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*Parables from nature, with notes
on the natural history*

Margaret Gatty



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PARABLES FROM NATURE.



“ Trust me, that for the instructed, time will come
When they shall meet no object but may teach
Some acceptable lesson to their minds,
Of human suffering, or of human joy.”

WORDSWORTH'S *Excursion*, Bk. IV.



RED SNOW.

PARABLES FROM NATURE.

BY MRS. ALFRED GATTY,

AUTHOR OF "PROVERBS ILLUSTRATED," "WORLDS NOT REALIZED,"

"AUNT JUDY'S TALES AND LETTERS," ETC.

WITH NOTES ON THE NATURAL HISTORY;

AND ILLUSTRATIONS BY LORENZ FRÖLICH, W. B. SCOTT,

M. E. EDWARDS, HARRISON WEIR, JOHN TENNIEL,

E. B. JONES, G. H. THOMAS, W. P. BURTON,

J. WOLFF, AND CHARLES KEENE.

THIRD AND FOURTH SERIES.



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. *The Engravings have been executed by MR. HORACE HARRAL.*





RED SNOW.

“ Or tu chi se', che vuoi sedere a scranna,
Per giudicar da lungi mille miglia
Con la veduta corta d'una spanna? ”—DANTE.

“ And who art thou, that on the stool wouldst sit
To judge at distance of a thousand miles,
With the short-sighted vision of a span? ”

CARY'S Translation.

LITTLE Siegfried, the widow's son, climbed day by day up the hill which overlooked his mother's cottage, and rambled about on the top, running after birds and insects, and gathering the beautiful wild-flowers that grow on the Swiss Alps.

There the dark blue gentians, and the Alpine rose, as it is called, and campanulas and salvias, are almost as common as the cowslips and daisies of English fields, and, from the brightness of their colours, make the hill-sides look like gardens, instead of uncultivated ground.

Little Siegfried's father had been killed in battle, some months before his child's birth, and so, when he came into the world, he was cradled in tears instead of smiles; and what wonder if he grew up less thoughtless and gay than other boys of his age.

It was his mother who had first shown Siegfried where to climb the hill, and where to find the finest flowers; and had made him look at the hills still higher than their own, by which

their valley was enclosed, and had pointed out to him Mont Blanc in the distance, looming like a shadowy giant in the sky.

For thus and thus had her husband shown her all these things, during the few happy months of their marriage, before he was called away to the wars; and on the same heights where the child now roamed after flowers, his parents had sat together among them, in quiet summer evenings, sometimes talking, sometimes reading, always praising God for the happiness he was permitting them to enjoy.

But having thus led her child to the spot so fondly endeared to herself, and bidden him rejoice in the sights and scenes of Nature, and told him of the protecting God of goodness who ruled over all, the widowed mother went back alone to her cottage, to weep out in secret her re-awakened grief. Siegfried, meanwhile, amused himself on the flowery heights, his new play-ground; and after he had gathered for his mother the nosegay she had asked him to bring, he lay down on the soft turf, and looked round at the hills, and up to the snowy sides of the huge Mont Blanc, (of which he could see so much more here than down in the valley below,) till it took possession of his fancy as something wonderful and grand; something far beyond the flowers, bright and lovely as they were.

And ever afterwards, day by day, when he had had enough of chasing and rambling, he used to lie down in the same place, and look at the hills in the same way, that he might feel again what he had felt at first.

Yet he found no sameness in the sight. The clouds that sometimes lifted themselves up from, and at other times come down over, the mountain, were never quite alike. The shadows that flitted across it varied from day to day in their shape and size and course; and the sunshine that broke over it was of many different tints, and lit it up in a thousand different ways. At one time it was wrapt in a silvery haze; at another the air became so clear, that the child could see the glittering of the snow atoms, as they seemed to dance in and out, like the stars in the sky.

So Siegfried never wearied of watching the huge mountain, but got to love it more and more, with a love mixed with respectful awe, and a feeling as if it had some sort of life and consciousness.

At last, one day, when his mother was putting his little basket in his hand, that he might go on the hill as usual to play, he asked her if he might go to the top of Mont Blanc instead, and if she would show him the way.

It was no wonder that the good widow smiled, as she told him that neither he nor she were able to climb up such a terrible mountain. But she did smile; and although she noticed how the little face flushed over as she spoke, she thought, naturally enough, that this was because of his disappointment. So, kissing him lovingly, she said, "You must be a great strong man, Siegfried, before you can scramble up the heights of Mont Blanc; and even for great strong men the way is very dangerous. And even if you were there, you would find nothing but cold and snow and misery; neither life nor flowers: our own hills are as pleasant again."

So Siegfried went away with his basket; but instead of running about and picking flowers, he threw himself at once upon the ground, and looked at the mountain, and cried, for he felt very sorry at what his mother had said. Presently, however, he wiped his eyes, and looked again; then sprang up and stared before him as if surprised. All the distance was bathed in bright sunshine, and the air was more transparent than usual, and, lo! a round rosy-coloured patch was visible on the far-off snows. He had never seen it before. What could it be? He thought he knew; and running hastily down to the cottage, threw open the door, and shouted in delight, "Mother! there is a rose on Mont Blanc!"

Siegfried's mother did not laugh now, for she saw the child was excited; and she was grieved for him. Ah! he had only half the love that should have been his; she must console him as best she could; he was not like other boys, she knew—and thinking this, she took him on her knee, and tried to explain to

him that it *must* be only some accidental light from the sky that caused the rosy patch, for that no vegetation of any kind grew on the sides of the snowy mountain ; there could be no roses there ; and she knew that it often looked pink in the evening sun—only now it was not evening.

Siegfried was silent for a few seconds, and hung down his head ; but presently he murmured out, “ Why ? ”

“ Ah, Siegfried ! ” cried the mother, “ is it not enough that God chooses it to be so ! It is He who sends the everlasting snows there, and the flowery herbage here.”

“ I am very sorry for the mountain,” persisted little Siegfried, sadly ; so sadly that his mother grieved for the fanciful child, and asked should she go up with him again to the hill, and see the rosy patch on the snow herself ? On which the smiles came back to Siegfried’s face, and they went away together very happily, and with the basket as usual ; for, said the mother, “ You came back empty-handed to-day, Siegfried, and brought me no flowers.”

But, by the time they reached the old spot, heavy mists had come down over the landscape, and neither Mont Blanc nor its rosy patch could be seen. Even Siegfried laughed at the journey they had had for nothing, and, after filling his basket, was contented to return home ; but in doing so, he began to talk again.

“ If we had fewer flowers, Mother, we should be quite as happy, and then the great mountain could have some too. I wish God would make things equal.”

“ Hush, little Siegfried, hush ! ” cried his mother, in a half whisper ; “ God has a right to do what He pleases, and we must not dispute about it, nor wish it otherwise. He chooses that there shall be desolate places as well as pretty ones in the world ; outcast ends of the earth, as it were, which nobody seems to care for, as well as happy valleys. I am afraid it is the same with human beings—men and women, I mean—which is much worse. I am afraid there are many outcast, God-deserted men, as well as desolate mountains. But you are too young to understand such things.”

The mother sighed as she spoke. Verily, she did not understand such things herself.

And so they walked on a few steps farther, and then the boy began again.

"At any rate, the top of the mountain is nearer Heaven than our hill, Mother. It goes right into the blue."

"No, no," cried the widow, passionately; "it only looks to be so. It is no nearer the real Heaven than we are. If it were, oh! would I not have gone there long ago, at the risk of life itself!"

The child looked up surprised at his mother, for she spoke in tones very unusual to her; and seeing how sad her face was, he wondered to himself if she, also, were fretting that Mont Blanc was so miserable and forlorn.

And, snatching the nosegay from the basket, he flung the flowers as far into the air as he could, exclaiming, "There! I wish you had wings, and would fly away to the mountain, and make it look beautiful, too!"

Nothing more was spoken between them, but after little Siegfried had said his evening prayers, and gone to bed, and while the mother was sitting alone in the chamber below, she heard a sound of sobbing; and, going up-stairs, found the boy crying bitterly; the only account he could give of which was, that he could not help thinking about the poor outcast, God-deserted mountain.

Now, it was not the mountain she had called God-deserted. That was his own disturbed idea; a confusion he had got into from what his mother had said. But how hard this was to explain! How painful to touch the chords of a subject which jarred so cruelly against the natural hopes and faith of a gentle heart!

How difficult also for one who had known the stern realities of sorrow, to "feel along" the more delicate "line" of an infant's dreamy griefs!

He was soothed by degrees, however, and after she left him, her thoughts soon wandered away from what she felt to be his fanciful troubles about the desolate mountain, to her own struggles with her desolate heart.

The next day was Sunday, and Siegfried was able to walk to the somewhat distant church, and even to repeat a few of the prayers, and listen, now and then, to bits of the sermon, when his mother thought there was something he could understand, and drew his attention to it.

But on this particular day there was no need for her to call his attention to the preacher; nay, had she been able, she would have been very glad to have prevented his hearing him at all. But how could he help hearing when the pastor, addressing his flock, asked if there was a single one, young or old, among them, who had not gazed hundreds and hundreds of times at the giant mountain of their land—the snow-covered, inaccessible heights of Mont Blanc?

Siegfried and his mother looked at each other, and his heart leapt within him, to think that now, at last, he should hear something about his mysterious friend; and, clasping his mother's hand tightly in his own, he listened for every word.

But, alas! for what he heard. The pastor, after describing the mountain in all the magnificence of its size and form, painted it as being, nevertheless, the region of hopeless desolation; the abode of everlasting lifelessness and despair. Cold, hard, insensible, what could rouse it from its death-like torpor? The life-giving sun shone upon it from day to day, from age to age; but no influence from its rays ever penetrated that frozen bosom. The dews fell upon it, the storms burst over it, equally in vain. Unmoved, it lifted up its gloomy crest to Heaven, as if defying its very Maker to touch the stony depths and bid the waters flow, or warm and soften them into life and gladness!

Siegfried was already in tears, but what followed was still worse, for the pastor now called upon his congregation to consider whether there was not something in the moral world of which the insensible mountain was but the too faithful type? And then he answered himself, Yes!—the hardened human heart, the wicked natural heart, the Pharaoh-heart of the multitude, on which the sunshine of Divine Grace and the storms of Divine Wrath were equally poured out in vain.

Yet, that "offences must needs come," he was well aware; that such God-deserted beings as he had spoken of, must come up and be cut down, he knew: "vessels of wrath appointed to destruction." But, oh! might none of the congregation now before him be of the number of those lost ones! Might all there present take warning henceforth, as they turned their eyes to the stiff-necked hill of their native country, and flee from the wrath of the Lamb!

Siegfried's sobs had by this time become so uncontrollable, that the neighbours were disturbed; and the widow thought the best thing she could do, was to rise up and leave the church with her child.

There was no use in arguing with him; he was both too young and too much distressed; added to which, his mother was scarcely less pained by the stern words than he was.

She, too, could have wept to think of "vessels of wrath appointed to destruction," and longed to hope against hope for the world of her fellow-creatures. In the material world she had but little interest, for she knew but little about it, and had not sufficiently considered the text which says that "God's mercy is over *all* His works;" not limited to one class of creatures, or even to one sort of life.

Feeling as she did, therefore, she entered into no discussion with her boy, but through the home evening contrived to divert his mind, by reading him pleasant stories of good people who had lived in favour with God, and had died full of hope and peace.

Nevertheless, Siegfried's last thought, as he fell asleep, was not of comfort and joy in the righteous, but of pity and almost love for all the wretched things for whom there seemed no hope.

The next day, his mother would fain have persuaded him to remain below in the valley, and seek some new amusement, but finding she could not reconcile him to the idea of forsaking his favourite haunt, she gave way, though with a sigh; and so, after his little daily tasks and helps to her were ended, he climbed up the heights as usual.

It was well that he had promised his mother to tease her no more about the matter. Otherwise, on that day, he would have made more fuss than ever, for, when the sun was at the highest, the rosy flush reappeared on the distant snow, only not now confined to one small patch, but spread in broad tracts of delicate colour, which threatened to cover the whole mountain with its Aurora-like tint.

Once or twice Siegfried's resolution to keep his promise nearly gave way, but he held out manfully even to the last, contenting himself, on his return into the valley, with inquiring of a neighbour's son, whom he met driving home his father's cattle, why some of the snow on the hills looked pink? At first the boy said he didn't know, but presently he recollected that he had heard it said, that red snow fell sometimes out of the sky. Very likely that was it; but what it was, or what became of it, he had no notion. Only it went away as it came. Nothing ever stopt on the hill but the snow that was always there.

Hearing this, Siegfried had no longer even a wish to speak to his mother about it. She would say it was because the mountain was so cold and hard, no good thing, even from Heaven, could stay upon it!

And thus a day or two passed, and the tracts of rosy colour grew fainter, and finally disappeared, as the farmer's son had said was always the case; and Siegfried never spoke about it again, but sat on the hill-side daily, wondering and dreaming to himself.

But he was interrupted at last. One morning, when the snow looked colder and whiter than ever against the blue sky, and he had been sitting for a while, with his face hidden by his hands, a voice he did not know called to him, asking what he was doing. And when he lifted up his eyes, a stranger stood between him and Mont Blanc.

A child always answers "Nothing" to such a question, for children never feel thinking to be doing anything.

But the stranger would not be so easily satisfied, and smiling, persisted in his inquiries.

“What are you thinking of then, little boy? One must be either doing or thinking while one is awake. And I want you to talk to me. I have come from such a long way off, and am so weary.”

Here the stranger seated himself by Siegfried's side on the grass.

“First,” continued he, “I want you to tell me, if you can, whether I can get to the town of —, through the pretty valley here at the bottom of this hill? Then, I want you to tell me for whom you have picked this basket of flowers? Then, why you are on this wild hill-side alone? Then, what you think about when you cover up your face with your hands? Now, then, can I get to the town through the valley?”

The voice that asked was so good-natured, and the smile on the stranger's face so kind, that Siegfried was won at once, and looking full at his new friend, and smiling himself, nodded assent to this first question.

“Does your nod always mean yes, little boy?” asked the stranger, amused.

Siegfried nodded again.

“Very good. Now we understand each other. Will you answer my other questions?”

Siegfried gave another nod, and then they both laughed, and the stranger went on.

“For whom have you gathered the flowers?”

“For my mother.”

“And why are you here alone?”

“To play.”

“What, alone? Why?”

“I have nobody else to play with.”

“And what is it you think of when you sit with your face covered up?”

Siegfried's heart melted within him, and, pointing by a sorrowful nod to the giant mountain, he answered, “I think of it.”

“Of it? What can you find in it to think about?”

“I am so sorry for it!” cried little Siegfried, passionately;

"so sorry it is so miserable and outcast, and that God will let nothing grow there, while we have all these flowers!"

And once more he tossed the flowers contemptuously out of the basket.

"Ah, little boy," said the stranger, putting his arm kindly round the child, and drawing himself nearer to him. "You must answer another question now. Who put such strange fancies into your head? Who told you this about the poor mountain?"

"They all say so," murmured Siegfried. "The pastor preached about it on Sunday, and mother says so, too, and the farmer's son, and everybody; and I am so sorry, so very sorry!"

The young voice died away, as it were, in regret.

"And why do you care so much about the mountain, little boy?"

Siegfried looked up, puzzled for a moment, but very soon out came the simple, child-like answer, "I look at it so much when I come up here to play."

It was the stranger's turn now to feel his eyes moisten, as he thought of the solitary child sending out his heart into the inanimate creation round him.

Extremely interested, therefore, he made a few more inquiries, and, by degrees, brought out a part, at any rate, of what Siegfried's mother and the pastor between them had told and taught of outcast countries and God-deserted men. All was confusion in the child's account, but the drift of it could easily be discovered.

Without making a single remark, however, the stranger smiled again, and said, quite cheerfully, "I will tell you a secret, little boy. Neither the pastor, nor your mother, nor the farmer's son, were ever up the mountain, I suspect, so they cannot know very very much about it."

"I wanted to go, but they would not let me," interposed Siegfried. "They said I was not able to get up."

"They said right," replied the stranger. "But I, you see, am older and stronger, and could go; and *I have been.*"

Quietly as he purposely spoke, the effect of what he said was, as he expected, very great. Siegfried jumped up; then sat down; then once more started from his seat, and was far more anxious to run down the hill and tell his mother the news, than to remain quietly where he was, and hear what more the stranger had to tell. He allowed himself to be controlled, however, and his friend went on talking as if he had not been interrupted.

“And the place is neither lifeless nor deserted. God sends it the beautiful red snow plant instead of flowers. I have been gathering it for days.”

As he spoke, he unfastened from the leathern strap that went across his shoulders a small tin box, and, opening it for a moment, let Siegfried peep at a bright carmine-coloured mass of something within.

The child was speechless at first, overpowered by admiration and delight, but presently exclaimed, “Then that was what I saw!” adding, gently, “And it really came down from Heaven, then?” He was thinking of what the farmer’s son had said.

“All good things come from Heaven, that is, from the God of Heaven,” answered the stranger. “But this is as much a plant as the Alpine rose by your side. It did not drop down from the sky, but grows in the very snow itself, and covers over miles and miles of the hill you thought so desolate. God sends good things everywhere, though not everywhere alike.”

Oh, the joy of such a doctrine! The simplest child could understand it, and be glad! All was explained now, too; the rosy patch and the broad tracts of colour were both accounted for, and Siegfried was as happy as he now believed the mountain to be. And, embracing his new friend, he forthwith began such a blundering account of what he, and his mother, and the farmer’s boy, had thought about the rosy patch, that the stranger could do nothing but laugh, and at last stopped him by exclaiming, “Then you see you were all wrong; but never mind. Take me to your mother’s cottage, and we will

tell her all about it, too, and I will show it to you both, for even you have not really seen it yet."

Siegfried's mother welcomed the friendly stranger whom her son brought to her door with all the heartiness of a Swiss welcome; and not the less when she found he was an English traveller, on his way to a neighbouring town to visit a well-known officer there, who had been deprived of a limb in the same action in which Siegfried's father had lost his life.

And as the town was but a few miles off, and the summer evenings so long, the stranger was easily persuaded to rest a few hours in the Swiss cottage, and tell the widow and her son the history of his adventures on Mont Blanc, and of the red snow plant he had brought from it. Not that telling its history only would have been enough; nor was there anything either beautiful or wonderful-looking in the red, jelly-like mass in the tin box, when looked at only with the naked eye. The stranger had far more in store for them than that.

"I am going to show you," he began, at last, and after busying himself in unpacking that revealer of secrets, a microscope,—“that God has sent many more gracious things into the world than people commonly think; because so many more than our natural eyes are able to see. Do you like to know this, little Siegfried?” he added, turning purposely to the child.

Siegfried nodded his heartiest nod of assent, and the widow said, with a smile, “You should have asked that question, Sir, of me. It is I who have not believed, because I did not see. He has had an instinct of the truth all along.”

“Well, then, good Mother,” replied the stranger, “you shall see and believe what will, I think, comfort you for life—namely, that God makes the very wilderness to burst forth and blossom like a rose: that there are no outcast ends of the earth, uncared for by Him; no desolate corners where His goodness is not shown forth.”

As he spoke he finished the last adjustment of the microscope, and touching the red jelly in the tin box with the fine point of a porcupine's quill, he placed the tiny morsel so obtained in a

glass, to be looked at, and called to Siegfried to have the first peep.

The widow, struck as she had been with the stranger's words, had her own doubts as to what there could be to be seen, for she had not been able to detect anything on the porcupine's quill; but she said nothing, and very soon Siegfried's shouts of delight announced that *something*, at any rate, was there.

And, truly, what there was, was a very pretty sight. Ten or fifteen bright little red balls, and a few colourless ones among them, were lying like gems in the drop or two of water which had been put in to keep them separate.

The child believed at once, but at the first moment the mother could scarcely credit what she saw. That this should be a bit of the shapeless stuff she had looked at in the tin box—it was marvellous indeed.

The stranger now proceeded to explain. He told them that each of the red balls was a plant perfect in itself. That it was a little colourless bag, finer than gold-beater's skin, filled with a red substance, which shone through. That, as soon as it was full grown, the red substance within divided into four, eight, and sometimes sixteen separate red balls, of course of the tiniest size possible, all which immediately began to grow very fast, and grew, and grew, and grew, till the little bag in which they lived could hold them no longer, but burst, and dropped them out.

"These," said he, "are the young plants; and when each of *them* is full grown, the same thing happens again. The red substance in each divides into other tiny balls, and, as these grow, they burst out from the parent bag, (called a *cell*, properly,) and begin life for themselves. And thus comes another generation of the ball-like plants, and so another and another; and all this so quickly, that, in a few hours, millions of them have sprung from a few single cells. So now, little Siegfried, you know why, when you looked the second time at the rosy patch, it had spread into those great broad tracts of colour which, in fact, covered over miles of the poor snow with its beauty. It was no wonder, was it?"

No, that was no wonder; but that such things were, of which so many people did not know, was a wonder from which the good widow could not easily recover. Besides, she was thinking of the pastor having made such a mistake.

As for Siegfried, he had not lived long enough to know why he should be so much surprised about the red snow plant; was it a bit more really strange than the growth of the Alpine rose, which astonished nobody? So his chief feeling was extreme delight at there being something on the mountain to make amends for its want of flowers.

"And now," said the stranger, "is there anything more you would like to ask?"

The mother was about to speak at once, but hesitated and drew back. She knew so little; she feared to seem so ignorant and foolish.

Reassured, however, she begged to be told how the marvellous plant could live amidst nothing but snow; could come up, and bring forth a thousand fold, with nothing to nourish and support it?

The stranger repeated the word "*nothing*" with a smile.

"Nothing, because we see nothing?"

"Ah, see what a bad habit is!" cried the mother. "I had forgotten already. Then you think there may be things I do not know of, in what we call the cold, barren snow?"

"Ay, ay," was the answer; "germs of life, hidden and buried, perhaps, for years; seeds scattered no one can tell how or when; and salts and chemical properties, needing only some accident of a sunbeam, or dew, or state of the very air, to make all work together, and the frozen surface to become moist, and the red snow plant to spring up by millions."

Here he paused, and seeing little Siegfried looking wistfully at him, as if trying to understand, he took him on his knee caressingly, and said, "That microscope is a very curious thing, is it not?"

The child nodded his "yes" as heartily as ever, and then

laid his head, contentedly, on his friend's shoulder, while he went on talking.

"Yes; it is very curious, for it shows us quantities of things we could not see without it; but the best lesson it teaches is, how much more there may be of which, even with its help, we can see and know nothing; for, although there is a limit to our power of seeing God's works, no naturalist dares to think he has reached the limits of the works themselves. In this life we cannot hope to know a hundredth part of the creations which surround us. You can believe this now, good Mother?"

"With all my heart," was her answer.

"And, further," he added, "you can judge now for yourself, that even of the things we do what we call see with the naked eye, there are a great many of which we can never know anything like the real truth, without such aid as this (pointing to the microscope). What was the red snow plant to you at first? A piece of shapeless jelly. What did it become to your more enlightened eye? A living organism, unmistakably from Almighty hands, endowed with a system of life, if not of life-enjoyment, peculiarly its own. This is something to have discovered, certainly, but is it all? Ah! as I tell it, I feel how imperfect the account is—how much remains behind. All we have done is but to have made a step or two out of complete ignorance.

'The rest remaineth unrevealed.'

Yet a glory comes into our hearts from the thought of the worlds beyond reach of our present senses, like the reflection from lightning below our own horizon, and both faith and hope ought to be strengthened."

The widow did not speak.

"I have one word more to say," continued the stranger guest, "if you will allow me to say it, and can forgive the old traveller for preaching as well as teaching. I have taught you something of God's doings in the natural world, which has given you comfort and hope. What, then, you believe of His

works, believe also of His mercies. If you cannot find a limit to the one, suspect and hope that the other, too, may be infinite—far beyond our comprehension. Will you try and take this last lesson to heart?"

The poor mother's eyes filled with tears. She had passed tremblingly through life, and sadly needed the good counsel.

After a short pause, her counsellor went on, firmly, but very kindly:—

"You have seen how weak and short-sighted the natural eye is; can you for a moment suppose that the spiritual eye is more far-seeing and better able to acquaint you with God's purposes and doings? Are His works to be infinite, and His mercies bounded, so that a man can point to the limit, and say, Here God's mercy ceases; here there is no hope—but only *everlasting lifelessness and despair*? Oh, good Mother, to whom is entrusted the rearing of a very tender plant, take heed what you teach, and foster in it, above all other virtues, the charity which 'hopeth all things,' and then can both believe and endure."

The lesson was not spoken in vain even then, and it was never forgotten. And Siegfried grew on, and the stranger revisited the cottage many times, and by-and-by aided in the education of the child whose acquaintance he had made in so singular a manner. And, after many years, the young man, Siegfried, became a teacher himself—a pastor—though not in his own country.

But never, through a long life, did he forget his early hopes, and fears, and fancies, about the desolate mountain, nor the lesson he learnt from the stranger traveller. And into whatever scenes of darkness and ignorance he forced his way; whatever he met with of sin and sorrow; however often baffled, thrown back, and disappointed, he never despaired; for he used to recall the past, and take comfort to himself by thinking, "It may be God's will yet, that the red snow plant may one day burst into life on the cold hill-side."



WHEREUNTO?



WHEREUNTO?

"I see in part
That all, as in some piece of art,
Is toil cöoperant to an end."

TENNYSON.



HIS is dreadful! What can I do?"

"Why, follow me, to be sure! Here!
quick! sideways! to the left! into this crevice
of the rock! there! all's right!"

"Oh, it's easy to talk, when people can trip
away as lightly as you do. But look at me with the ground
slipping away wherever I try to lay hold."

"Come along; all's right," repeated the Crab (for such was
the speaker) from his crevice in the rock.

And all was right certainly, as far as he was concerned; but
as for the poor Star-fish, who was left on the sand, all was as
wrong as possible, for he was much too hot; and no wonder.

It was a low tide—a spring tide—and even for a spring tide,
a particularly low one; for there was very little wind astir, and
what there was, blew off the shore.

So rocks were uncovered now, which seldom tasted the
air, and the stems of the great oarweed, or tangle, which grew
from them, were bent into a half-circle by the weight of their
broad leathery fronds, as, no longer buoyed up by the sea, they
lay trailing on the sands.

What a day it was, to be sure! one of those rare, serene ones, when there is not a cloud in the delicate blue sky, and when the sea lies so calm and peaceful under it, that one might almost be persuaded to believe nothing would ever again ruffle its surface. The white-sailed vessels in the distance, too, looked as if they had nothing in the world to do for ever, but to float from one beautiful end of the world to the other, in security and joy. Yet delicious—unspeakably delicious—as the day was, it brought discomfort to some who lived under it. The numberless star-fishes, for instance, who had been unexpectedly left stranded on the shore by the all-too-gently-retreating waves, how could they rejoice in the beautiful sunshine, when it was streaming so pitilessly on their helpless limbs, and scorching them by its dry cruel heat? And as for the jelly fishes, who had shared a similar fate, they had died almost at once from the shock, as the wave cast them ashore; so of the merits of the delicious day they knew nothing at all.

All creatures did not suffer, of course. The Crab, for instance, who had given such good advice to his friend (if he could but have followed it), did very well. In the first place, he liked the air nearly as well as the water, so that being left high and dry on the shore now and then was quite to his taste. Moreover, he could scuttle off and hide in a crevice of the rocks whenever he chose. Or he could shelter under the large seaweeds, and because of his hard coat was even able to take a short walk from time to time, to see how matters went on, and observe how far the tide had gone down; and if the sun did happen to bake him a little too much, he had only to run off to a pool and take a bath, and then was as fresh as ever in a minute.

And now, just as the tide was at the lowest, where it was likely to beat about for some time without much change, two other creatures appeared on the sands, and approached the very spot where the Star-fish lay in his distress, and near which the Crab was hid. Now there was a ledge of rocks here, which

would have furnished seats for dozens of human beings, and from the front of it grew almost a forest of oarweed plants.

What the creatures were who came up to this place and stopped to observe it, I shall not say; but one of them remarked to the other, "Here again, you see; the same old story as before. Wasted life and wasted death, and all within a few inches of each other! Useless, lumbering plants, not seen half-a-dozen times in the year; and helpless, miserable sea-creatures, dying in health and strength, one doesn't know why."

As the creature who spoke, said this, it lifted up two or three tangle fronds with a stick it carried in its hand, and then let them flop suddenly down on the sand; after which it used the end of the same stick to chuck the unhappy Star-fish into the air, who, tumbling by a lucky accident under the shelter of the tangle, was hid for a time from sight.

"And so we go up, and so we go down, ourselves," continued the creature; "a good many of us, with no more end in life, and of no more use, that one can see, than these vile useless sea-weeds; coming into the world, in fact, for no earthly purpose but to go out of it, in some such wretched manner as this!"

And here the creature kicked three or four more stranded star-fishes across the narrow sands, till he had fairly kicked them into the sea; muttering as he did so, "What did *you* come into the world for, I wonder, and *you*, and *you*, and *you*? Purposeless life and purposeless death—the fate of thousands. And I for one as useless as any of them, but at any rate having the grace to acknowledge that the world would get on quite as cleverly without me as with! Whereunto, whereunto, whereunto? Answer it if you can!" As the creature finished speaking, the two moved on together; but what the companion answered was never exactly known; for though the voice sounded as if in dispute, what was said was not heard by those who were left behind, for they began at once to chatter among themselves.

And first out popped the head of the Crab from the crevice he

had taken shelter in; and he cocked his eyes knowingly, first to one side, and then to the other, and began to talk; for he had always plenty to say for himself, and was remarkably bold when there was no danger. "Miserable sea-creatures!" was his first exclamation, repeating what the land-creature had said. "I suppose *I* am included in that elegant compliment. I say! where are you, old Lilac-legs? Have you contrived to crawl away after all? Come out of your corner, or wherever you are, for a bit. Who was the creature that was talking such nonsense just now? Only let me come across him, that's all! *Helpless* sea-creatures, indeed! I should like to have seen *him* hiding in a crevice as nimbly as I can do! He'd better not come within reach of me any more, I can tell him!"

It was all very well for the Crab to sit outside the rock looking so fierce, and brushing his mouth so boldly with his whisker-like feelers, now that there was nobody to fight with. How he would have scuttled away sideways into his hole, if *the creature* had reappeared, everybody can guess.

"You happy fellow!" answered the meek voice of the Star-fish, Lilac-legs; "you can afford to joke about everything, and can do whatever you please. You have so many things in your favour—your stiff coat, and your jointed legs, and your claws with pincers at their ends, and your large eyes. Dear me, what advantages! And yet I have an advantage too, and that a very great one, over you all, so I shall not grumble, especially not now that I am in the shade. That sun was very unpleasant, certainly; I felt something between scalded and baked. Horrible! but I am sheltered now. And how did that come to pass, do you think?"

The Star-fish paused for an answer; but the Crab declared he couldn't think—had no time for thinking; it was too slow work to suit him. So Lilac-legs told him how she had been chucked into the air by the stick, and how she had come down in the midst of the tangle, and fallen under shelter. "So you see," added she in conclusion, "that you were quite right in

saying what nonsense the creature talked. Why, he said he was as useless as these vile useless sea-weeds, and had come into the world, like them, for nothing; whereas, don't you see, he was born to save me, which was something to be born for, at any rate, that's quite clear; and so was the vile useless sea-weed, as he called it, too. I, with my advantages, can tell them both that!"

"You go in and out, and in and out, over people's remarks, till you make me quite giddy, I get so puzzled," replied the Crab; "and then you are always talking of your *advantages*," he continued, whisking his feelers backwards and forwards conceitedly as he spoke, "and I can't make out what they are. I wish you would say at once what you mean."

"Oh, my advantages, you want to know about?" answered Lilac-legs. "Well, I certainly have one in each leg, near the end, with which I—but I don't think I can describe it exactly. You have several advantages yourself, as I told you just now, and we have one or two in common; for instance, the loss of a leg or two is nothing to either of us; they grow again so quickly; but still *I* am very helpless now and then, I must admit! on the sand, for instance—it is so soft—and the more I try to lay hold, the more it slips away. Still these advantages in my legs make amends for a good deal, for at any rate I know my own superiority, and there's a great comfort in that; I can't explain, but you may safely take it for granted, that with my advantages, I know a good deal more than you give me credit for. I know, for instance, that the poor ignorant creature need not consider himself useless, since he was the means of chucking me here, and that this fine old tangle hasn't lived for nothing, since it is sheltering me."

"How conceited some people are with their advantages!" murmured a silver voice from one of the tangle fronds. "If the tangle had come into the world for nothing but to shelter you, there would have been a fuss to very little purpose, indeed! Can't your advantages tell you there are other creatures in the

world quite as important as yourself, if not more so, you poor helpless Lilac-legs? Do you know who is speaking? It is the blue-eyed Limpet, I beg to say—the *Patella pellucida*, if you please. *I* have an advantage or two myself! My coat is harder even than the crab's, and it is studded with a row of azure spots, as bright as the turquoise itself. That *is* something to reflect upon in one's solitude, I can assure you! and the tangle plants are the natural home and food of our lovely race. The creature was ignorant enough in calling them useless, therefore, of course; but you were not much wiser in thinking they were put into the world to shelter *you*. I flatter myself I have said enough! To be the home and the food of beings like us, is cause sufficient—almost *more* than sufficient, I venture to think—for the existence of any vegetable that fringes these shores. And while they live for us, our turquoise-gemmed backs are, in return, their highest ornament and pride. The whole thing is perfect and complete. Anybody with half an eye, and a grain of understanding, may see that!"

"Oh, the narrow-mindedness of people who live under a shell!" murmured a score of whispers, in unison, from another tangle frond close by. "Oh, the assurance of you poor moveable limpets in talking about your *home*, when you do but stick to first one part of these vast leaves and then another, moving from place to place, and never fairly settling anywhere? *Home*, indeed, you call it? What sort of a home is it, when an unlucky chance can force you off at any moment, or some passing creature pick you from your hold? The pretension would be disgusting, if it were not so absurd. Think of mere travellers, as one may say, talking of their lodging-house as if it was their own, and belonged to them by a natural right!—how ridiculous, if not wrong! *We* can afford to speak—we, of whose dwelling-places it is the foundation and support. Talk of the useless tangle, indeed! Yes, the creature was ignorant truly, who said so. Little he knew that it was the basis of the lives of millions. Little he knew of the silver net-work we

spread over it from year to year, or of the countless inhabitants of the beautiful web—a fairy-land of beings, so small, that the crab can scarcely see us, yet spreading so far and wide, and accomplishing so much; but that is because we work in unison, of course. *We* never quarrel among ourselves, as some folks do—not altogether unlike the crab in the crevice yonder. We work to one end, so we are sure to continue strong. Useless tangles, forsooth! when they have been the foundations of colonies like ours from the beginning of the world! Of course the thing is clear enough to those who choose to look into it; any one who knows *us*, can tell people what the tangle is in the world for, I should think!”

“Hear how they talk,” murmured another shell-fish, no distant relation of the blue-eyed limpet who had spoken before, and who lay hidden in the midst of the twisted roots by which the tangle stem held fast to the rock; “hear how the poor scurfy creatures talk, to be sure, as if there was nobody in the world but themselves. But anything can talk, which has so many mouths to talk with. I could say a good deal myself, if I chose to try, with only one; but I don’t care to let out my secrets into everybody’s foolish ears. Much better hold my tongue, than let certain people, not a hundred miles off, know I am here. I don’t fancy being sucked at by star-fishes, or picked out of my place by crab’s claws. Of course I know what the tangle is in the world for, as well as anybody else. For while they are fighting merely about his flapping leathery ends, here I sit in the very heart of the matter; safe in the roots themselves, knowing what’s what with the cleverest of them. Useless tangle, the creature said—useless enough, perhaps, as far as he could tell, who only looked at the long, loose, rubbishy leaves; but those who want to know the truth of the matter, must use their eyes to a little more purpose, and find out what’s going on at the roots. Ah, they’d soon see then what the tangle is for! I don’t speak of myself alone, though of course I know *one* very sufficient reason why the tangle is in the world, if I chose to say.

Am I right, little Silver-tuft, in the corner there, with the elegant doors to your house?"

Now, little Silver-tuft, the Coralline, piqued herself particularly on the carving of the curious doors which guarded the front of every one of the numberless cells in which her family lived; so she was flattered by the compliment, and owned that the limpet was right in the main. She was, nevertheless, rather cool in her manner, for, thought she to herself, "The rough fellow forgets that he is but a lodger here, as the sea-mat said of his blue-eyed cousin; whereas everybody knows that *I* am a *bonâ-fide* inhabitant, though with a little more freedom of movement than people who stick to their friends so closely as to cover them up! No offence to the sea-mat, or anybody who can't help himself. Nevertheless, my fibres being firmly interlaced with the roots, I am here by right for ever. These limpets may talk as they please, but nobody in their senses can suppose the tangle came into the world merely to accommodate chance travellers like them, even though they may now and then spend their lives in the place. But vanity blinds the judgment, that's very clear. Roots and plants have to grow for such as myself and my silver-tuft cousins, however; but that's quite another affair. There's a reason in that—a necessity, I may say; we want them, and of course, therefore, they are here. The thing is as straightforward and plain to anybody of sense, as—"

But, unfortunately, the simile was lost; for a wave of the now-returning tide interrupted Silver-tuft's speech, by breaking suddenly over the tangle with a noisy splash. It drew back again for a bit immediately after; but, meantime, both plants and animals were revelling in the delicious moisture, and for a few moments thought of nothing else. And just then, hurrying along the narrow strip of sand that yet remained exposed, as fast as their legs could carry them, came the land-creature and its companion.

Before, however, they had passed the spot where they had stopped to talk when the tide was low, another wave was seen

coming; to avoid which, the friends sprang together on the ledge of rock, and from thence watched the gathering water, as it fell tumbling over the forest of tangle plants. And again and again this happened, and they remained to observe it, and see how the huge fronds surged up like struggling giants, as the waves rushed in below; and how by degrees, as the tide rose higher and higher, their curved stems unbent, so that they resumed their natural position, till at last they were bending and bowing in graceful undulations to the swell of the water, as was their wont.

And, "Look at them!" cried the creature's companion. "For the existence of even these poor plants in the world, I could give you a hundred reasons, and believe that as many more might be found. Of their use, I could tell you a hundred instances in proof; there is not one of them but what gives shelter to the helpless, food to the hungry, a happy home to as many as desire it, and vigour and health to the element in which it lives. Purposeless life, you talk of! Such a thing exists nowhere. Come, I will explain. To begin—but see, we must move on, for the wind as well as the tide is rising, and we might chance to be caught. Follow me quick, for even *we* might be missed; and, besides, it is cowardly to shirk one's appointed share of work and well-doing before one's time. For if the vile seaweeds are able to do good in the world, how much more—"

But here, too, the discourse was cut short by the roar of a breaking wave, which carried the conclusion out of hearing.

People talk of the angry sea; was he angry now at what he had heard? No, he was only loud and in earnest, after all. But undoubtedly he and the risen wind between them contrived to make a great noise over the tangle beds. And he gave his opinion pretty strongly on the subject in hand. For, cried he, "You foolish creatures, one and all! what is all this nonsense about? Who dares to talk of useless sea-weeds while I am here to throw their folly in their face? And you, poor little worms and wretches, who have been talking your small talk together, as if it was in

your power to form the least idea of anything an inch beyond your own noses—well, well, well, I won't undeceive you! There, there! believe what you like about yourselves and your trumpery little comforts and lives; but if any really philosophical inquirer wants to know what sea-weeds are in the world for, and what good they do, I will roar them the true answer all day long, if they please—to keep me, the great sea, pure, and sweet, and healthy! There, now, that's the reply! They suck in my foul vapours as food, and give me back life-supporting vapours in return. Vile and useless! What fool has called *anything* so? Only let me catch him—thus—"

Bang!—with what a roar that wave came down! and yet it did no harm—didn't even dislodge the Crab from the new crevice he had squeezed himself into for the present. And as to Star-fish Lilac-legs, she was spreading herself out in the rocking water, rejoicing in her regained freedom, and telling all her friends of her wonderful escape, and of the creature who had been born into the world on purpose to save her from an untimely death.

It was a very fine story indeed; and the longer she told it, the more pathetic she made it, till at last there was not a creature in the sea who could listen to it with dry eyes.





PURRING WHEN YOU'RE PLEASED.



PURRING WHEN YOU'RE PLEASED.

"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."—*Matt. xii. 34.*

THEY had been licked over hundreds of times by the same mother, had been brought up on the same food, lived in the same house, learnt the same lessons, heard the same advice, and yet how different they were! Never were there two kittens more thoroughly unlike than those two! The one, with an open, loving heart, which never could contain itself in its joy, but purred it out at once to all the world; the other, who scarcely ever purred at all, and that never above its breath, let him be as happy or as fond as he would.

It was partly his mother's fault, perhaps, for she always set her children the example of reserve; rarely purring herself, and then only in a low tone. But, poor thing, there were excuses to be made for her; she had had so many troubles. Cats generally have. Their kittens are taken away from them so often, and they get so hissed about the house when people are busy, and the children pull them about so heedlessly, and make the dogs run after them—which is so irritating—that really the wonder is they ever purr at all!

Nevertheless, her not feeling inclined to purr much herself was no good reason for her thinking it silly or wrong in other people to purr when they were pleased; but she did, and she

and her purring daughter were always having small tiffs on the subject.

Every morning, for instance, when the nice curly-headed little boy brought the kittens a saucer of milk from his breakfast, there was sure to be a disturbance over the purring question, for, even before the saucer had reached the floor, Puss Missy was sure to be there, tail and head erect and eager, singing her loudest and best, her whole throat vibrating visibly; while Puss Master, on the contrary, took his food, but said very little about it, or, if ever tempted to express his natural delight, did it in so low a tone that nobody could hear without putting their ears close down to him to listen.

Now this was what the mother cat called keeping up one's dignity and self-respect, so it can easily be imagined how angry she used to get with the other child. "Wretched little creature!" she would say to poor Puss Missy, who, even after the meal was over, would lie purring with pleasure in front of the fire; "what in the world are you making all that noise and fuss about? Why are you to be always letting yourself down by thanking people for what they do for you, as if you did not deserve it, and had not a right to expect it? Isn't it quite right of them to feed you and keep you warm? What a shame it would be if they left you without food or fire! I am ashamed to see you make yourself so cheap, by showing gratitude for every trifle. For goodness' sake have a little proper pride, and leave off such fawning ways! Look at your brother, and see how differently *he* behaves!—takes everything as a matter of course, and has the sense to keep his feelings to himself; and people are sure to respect him all the more. It keeps up one's friends' interest when they are not too sure that one is pleased. But you, with your everlasting acknowledgments, will be seen through, and despised very soon. Have a little more esteem for your own character, I do beg! What is to become of self-respect if people are to purr whenever they are pleased?"

Puss Missy had not the least notion what would become of it

in such a case, but she supposed something dreadful ; so she felt quite horrified at herself for having done anything to bring such a misfortune about, and made a thousand resolutions to keep up her dignity, save self-respect from the terrible unknown fate in store, and purr no more.

But it was all in vain. As soon as ever anything happened to make her feel happy and comfortable, throb went the little throat, as naturally as flowers come out in spring, and there she was in a fresh scrape again ! And the temptations were endless. The little boy's cousin, pale, and quiet, and silent as she was, would often take Puss Missy on her knee, and nurse her for half-an-hour at a time, stroking her so gently and kindly—how could any one help purring ?

Or the boy would tie a string, with a cork at the end of it, to the drawer-handle of a table, so that the kittens could paw it, and pat it, and spring at it, as they pleased—how was it possible not to give vent to one's delight in the intervals of such a game, when the thing was swinging from side to side before their very eyes, inviting the next bound ?

And when there was nothing else to be pleased about, there were always their own tails to run after, and the fun was surely irresistible, and well deserved a song.

Yet the brother very seldom committed himself in that way—that was the great puzzle, and Puss Missy grew more perplexed as time went on. Nay, once, when they were alone together, and her spirits had quite got the better of her judgment, she boldly asked him, in as many words, “ Why do you not purr when you are pleased ? ” as if it was quite the natural and proper thing to do. Whereat he seemed quite taken by surprise, but answered at last : “ It's so weak-minded, mother says ; I should be ashamed. Besides,” added he, after a short pause, “ to tell you the truth—but don't say anything about it—when I begin, there's something that chokes a little in my throat. Mind you don't tell—it would let me down so in mother's eyes. She likes one to keep up one's dignity, you know.”

Had Mother Puss overheard these words, she might have been a little startled by such a result of her teaching; but, as it was, she remained in happy ignorance that her son was influenced by anything but her advice.

. . . Yet, strange to say, she had that choking in the throat sometimes herself! . . .

But, at last, a change came in their lives. One day their friend, the curly-headed boy, came bounding into the kitchen where Puss and her kittens were asleep, in raptures of delight, followed by the pale, quiet, silent cousin, as quiet and silent as ever. The boy rushed to the kittens at once, took up both together in his hands, laid one over the other for fun, and then said to the girl, "Cousin, now they're going to give us the kittens for our very own, just tell me which you like best, really? I'm so afraid you won't choose for yourself when they ask you, and then, if I have to choose instead, I shan't know which you would rather have! And I want you to have the one you like most—so do tell me beforehand!"

"Oh, I like them both!" answered the girl, in the same unmoved, indifferent tone, in which she generally spoke.

"So do I," replied her cousin; "but I know which I like best for all that; and so must you, only you won't say. I wonder whether you like to have the kittens at all?" added he, looking at the pale child a little doubtfully; then whispering, as he put them both to her face to be kissed, "Cousin, dear, I wish I could see when you were pleased by your face! See! give a smile when the one you like best goes by. Do—won't you—this once—just for once?"

It was in vain! he passed the kittens before her in succession, that she might see the markings of their fur, but she still only said she liked both, and, of course, was glad to have a kitten, and so on; till, at last, he was disheartened, and asked no more.

It is a great distress to some people when their friends will *not* purr when they are pleased; and as the children went back

together to the drawing-room, the little boy was the sadder of the two, though he could not have explained why.

And then, just what he expected happened,—the choice between the two kittens was offered first to the girl; but, instead of accepting it as a favour, and saying "Thank you" for it, and being pleased, as she ought to have been, she would say nothing but that she liked both, and it could not matter which she had; nay, to look at her as she spoke, nobody would have thought she cared for having either at all!

How was it that she did not observe how sorrowfully her aunt was gazing at her as she spoke; aye, and with a sorrow far beyond anything the kittens could occasion?

But she did not; and presently her aunt said, "Well, then, as she did not care, the boy should choose." On which the poor boy coloured with vexation; but when he had sought his cousin's eyes again and again in vain for some token of her feelings, he laid sudden hold on Puss Missy, and cuddled her against his cheek, exclaiming:

"Then I will have this one! I like her much the best, mother, because she purrs when she is pleased!"

And then the little girl took up Puss Master, and kissed him very kindly, but went away without saying another word.

And so a week passed; and though the children nursed their kittens, they never discussed the question of which was liked best again, for a shyness had sprung up about it ever since the day the choice had been made.

But at the end of the week, one sunshiny morning, when the boy was riding his father's pony, and only the little girl was in the house, her aunt, coming suddenly into the school-room, discovered her kneeling by the sofa, weeping a silent rain of tears over the fur-coat of Puss Missy, who was purring loudly all the time; while her own kitten, Puss Master, was lying asleep unnoticed by the fire.

* * * * *

Now, the pale, silent little girl had been an orphan nearly

two years—father and mother having died within a few weeks of each other; and she had been ever since, till quite lately, under the care of a guardian, who, though married, had no children, and was more strict and well-intentioned than kind and comprehending; so that, between sorrow at first and fear afterwards, joined to a timid, shrinking nature, she had, without knowing anything about it, shut herself up in a sort of defensive armour of self-restraint, which, till now, neither aunt, nor uncle, nor even loving cousin, had been able to break through.

But they had gently bided their time, and the time had come at last, and Puss Missy pointed the moral; for, with her aunt's arms folded round her, and a sense of her comforting tenderness creeping into the long-lonely heart, she owned that she had fretted all the week in secret because—actually because—*it was so miserable to nurse a kitten who would not purr when he was pleased!*

* * * * *

Anybody may guess how nice it was, ten minutes afterwards, to see the little girl, with the roused colour of warm feeling on her cheeks, smiling through her tears at the thought of how like the unpurring kitten she had been herself! Anybody may guess, too, with what riotous joy the loving boy-cousin insisted on her changing kittens at once, and having Puss Missy for her very own. And how, on the other hand, he set to work himself, with a resolute heart, to make Puss Master so fond of him that purr he must, whether he would or no; and how that, now and then, by dint of delicate attentions, such as choice morsels of food and judicious rubbing under the ears, he worked the creature up to such a pitch of complacency, that the vibrations of his throat became, at any rate, visible to sight, and perceptible to touch.

Truly, they were a very happy party; for after Puss Master took Puss Missy for friend, confidante, and adviser, he grew so loving and fond, that he could not help showing his feelings in

a thousand pretty, pleasant ways: and the mother-cat herself relaxed by degrees; perhaps because she found her kittens were not taken away—partly, perhaps, because Puss Missy's open-heartedness stole into her heart at last with a sense of comfort—who knows? Certainly she left off scolding and lecturing, and would not only watch their gambols, but join in them at times herself. And if neither she nor her son ever purred quite so much, or so loudly as their neighbours, the reason, no doubt, was only that tiresome choking in the throat!

Why, the pale little girl herself complained of having felt something very like it, during the sad two years before her kind aunt made her happy again! It always used to come on when she wanted to say what she felt.

And, perhaps, there is always something that chokes in the throat when people do not purr when they are pleased.

Let us hope so!







THE VOICES OF THE EARTH.



THE VOICES OF THE EARTH.

“ Let every thing that hath breath, praise the Lord.”—*Psaln* cl. 6.

WOULD that I could pass away, and cease to be!” murmured the Wind, as it performed its circuits round the earth, long ages ago. “ Would that I could cease to be! Since the creation of man, existence has become insupportable.”

“ Thou art mad!” cried the Mountains and Valleys, over whom the wind was passing, with its outcry of lamentation. “ Is not man the glory of the world, the favourite of Heaven? Surely thou art mad, or else jealous of the greatness of others—jealous of the master-piece of creation. O thou, ungrateful and unwise, to whom is committed the privilege of refreshing the earth and its inhabitants, why turn aside to hold judgment and condemn? Enough that thou fulfil thine own appointed work, and, in so doing, exist to the glory of the Creator.”

“ Yet, hear me in patience,” wailed the Wind. “ It is for the honour of man, and the glory of his Creator, that I am so troubled. Hence comes all my misery. I, who know no rest but in His will, and once went on my way rejoicing,—I now am, of all creatures, the most miserable. Oh earth, with thy mountains and valleys, and forests, and fast-flowing rivers and seas, do me justice! Thou knowest it was not so with me of old, when I was first called into being. Thou knowest with

what joy I roamed over thy confines, and beheld the universal beauty that then was spread around ; how tenderly I whispered through thy flowers, how joyfully I carried up their fragrant odours as a thank-offering to Heaven ; how merrily I sported on the hills, or taught the branches of thy lofty trees to bow, as in obeisance to Him who made them ! Thou knowest that I even failed not in due obedient love, when storms were needed ; whether to drive the sluggish vapours through the sky, or rouse the sea itself to healthy action. When have I ever failed ? Have I not always fulfilled His word ? For even now, in these my days of misery, I carry out unwearingly the great decree. Still I bear aloft from tropical seas, in ceaseless revolution round the world, those vapours which must descend in northern latitudes as dew, or rain, or snow. Still I labour—still I love to labour in the way ordained. But woe for me ! another burden than labour is upon me now ! Woe for the pollution I have suffered, since the earth was overspread by the wretched race of men ! Woe for their civilized lands, which I must needs pass through ! Woe for the cities, and towns, and villages, their haunts and habitations, which I cannot avoid ! Woe ! for I bear thence in my bosom the blasphemies of the multitudes, and am laden with the burden of ingratitude, denial, and doubt. Woe that I must spread these black results of misguided reason from pole to pole ! Woe that I must carry up the jests of the scorner and the oaths of the intemperate, as incense from man to his Maker : from man formed in His image, and boasting in his faculties of sense ! Oh that I could pass away, and cease from being ! and that with me might perish these fruits of an evil heart of unbelief !”

“ Thou hast numbered curses,” breathed the Mountains and Valleys in reply ; “ and alas ! that such should ever defile thee, thou messenger of blessing. But this is not all thou bearest upon thy wings. Other outpourings stream into thy bosom ; other voices are wafted upon thee to the skies ; other sounds are spread by thee from pole to pole. Hast thou weighed in the

balance, against the utterances of the rebellious, the prayers of the faithful, the childlike, and the pure; the steadfast avowal of martyrs; the daily thanksgiving of saints; the songs of holy praise and joy?"

"Yet what are these but what are due, and more than due, ten hundred thousand fold?" exclaimed the angry Wind. "What merit can you find in these? How strike a balance between them and the unnatural sin which says, 'There is no God'? All His works everywhere have praised Him from the beginning: only among men is there silence and doubt. And shall the remnant take credit for not joining in their sin? Inanimate creation and the beasts have never swerved from their allegiance. What room is there for boasting in man? Has he done more than these, from the foundation of the world?"

"But he alone of all creation, with a free, intelligent will."—The words came up in soft response from the Earth, and spread like harmony upon the air.—"He alone of all creation, with a free, intelligent will. Merit there can be none, indeed; but acceptability—where can it ever be found, but in the free-will worship of a spirit which has choice? And if choice, then, of necessity, liberty to err. And with liberty to err, comes, alas! the everlasting contest between right and wrong. Yet why do I say, 'alas'? Obedience to a law which cannot be resisted is not the service of the heart—not the highest tribute to the Creator's glory. Far dearer to Him may be the struggle by which the human will is subdued to unison with the will Divine, in anticipation of that day when all its wisdom shall be made known. Have patience, then, with the contest between good and evil, so long as the good is accepted of Heaven; and while this is so, be contented to labour and to be!"

"Yet listen once again," sighed the Wind. "I have been jealous for the glory of the Maker, it is true, and troubled for the honour of man. But I am also wretched for myself. Oh Earth, Earth, Earth! The Creator has made his human

favourite mortal ! The mountains stand fast for ever, the hills cannot be moved, the very trees survive from generation to generation ; but man—the chosen—passes away like a shadow ; he cometh up and is cut down as the grass ; I go over him, and his place knows him no more. Alas for the misery I am doomed to share ! The breath of the dying has passed into my soul for ages ; it is borne upon every breeze ; it has tainted every air. I am filled with those bitter agonies, and loathe my very being. Would that I could pass away into nothing, and be as though I had never been, that so I might taste no more the vile dishonour of death."

"Thou judgest with the judgment of those who see and know but in part," came up the soothing answer from the Hills. "What, if the dying breath, which falls so sadly on thy breast, releases from its prison-house of clay some spirit more ethereal than thine own, some essence subtler far than thine, which thou must bear before the mercy-seat ? Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right ? Canst thou not trust the Almighty with His own ? Why grieve for the last sigh of perishing flesh, if it be also the first breathing of a freed immortal soul ? How rail at death, if it is He who strikes the chord of everlasting life ?"

"Yet once more hear me, and be just," persisted the Wind. "Not the breath of the dying only overwhelms me with this wild desire to be at rest. The breath of the living who suffer on, is even worse. The sigh of natural grief, which none can blame ; the moanings of the afflicted in mind, body, or estate ; the outcries of the oppressed and desperate ; the shrieks of madness and of pain, the groanings of despair ; all, all are out-poured on me ! Those dreadful voices haunt me from all sides. This mass of human woe corrodes my soul. I meet it in the cottage, and pass through to find it in the palace ; I rush from the battle-field to the cloister, but in vain ! for no seclusion can shut out man from sorrow. Wherever the chosen creature is found, there must I gather up the voices of grief ; for lo ! as

the sparks fly upwards, so man is born to trouble. Oh that I might pass away for ever, and cease to know the wretchedness I have no power to avert!"

"Yet wait, wait, wait," implored another whisper from the Earth. "What, if in human sorrow may be found an answer to the riddle of human guilt? What, if amidst its saddest cries, thou carriest up the voice of heartfelt penitence on high? Wilt thou not weigh against the transient earthly grief the joy in heaven for one repenting sinner? Or, if amidst the mortal agony of the righteous, the triumph-songs of faith grow loud as those the angels sing around the throne,—'Thy will, Thy will, Thy will—doing or suffering—Thy will be done;'—wouldst thou not fear to take away the one, lest the other perchance should fail from off the earth? Watch well the balance between suffering and its fruits; but while these rise acceptable on thee to Heaven, well mayst thou rest contented in thy work, and rejoice both to labour and to be."

"Yet is man—the favourite—of all creatures the most wretched," moaned the Wind, "since he alone must purchase happiness with pain."

"Unjust! unjust!" expostulated the Earth. "Thou keepest record of men's sighs, hast thou no consciousness of the unceasing breathings of simple, natural joys? Yet, number the one by thousands, and by tens of thousands of the other will I answer and refute thy words. The peaceful respirations of health, unnoticed and, alas! how often, unthankfully enjoyed through years, count them if thou canst! Count them as they float to thee, while the night hours pass over the sleeper's head: count them when he wakes with the young daylight to a fresh existence. Count the laughs of frolic childhood. Count the murmurs of happy love. Count the stars if thou wilt, but thou canst never count the daily outpourings of common earthly joys. Alas for those who judge of life only by startling periods, and are deaf to the still small voices, which tell of hourly mercies, hour by hour!"

"Yet once more listen," cried the Wind, "for more and worse remains behind. The utterances of vice—oh, innocent Earth, in whom the glory of the Creator is yet visible to all!—I sicken at the thought of what I know; of what I bear unwillingly about. The loathsome words of sin—the lies of the deceiver—the prating of the fool—the seductions of the dissolute—the shouts of drunken revelry—the songs of the profane—the gifts of speech and thought misused to evil:—those voices horrible to God and man. . . ."

"Be they as dust before thee, and thou as the Angel of the Lord scattering them!" shouted a cry of indignation from the Earth. "Yet wait, wait, wait! For thyself, be thou still contented to labour and to be. Wouldst thou be wiser than the Judge? Wilt thou lose patience, while He yet forbears? No! watch the balance as before, and weigh the evil and the good. And so long as the prayers which the faithful pour on thy bosom outnumber the words of the scorner; so long as the blessings of the righteous float above the curses of the blasphemer; so long as the voice of penitence follows close upon the utterances of sin; so long as pious submission makes harmony of the cries of grief; so long as thou carriest up daily thanksgiving for unnumbered daily mercies; so long as the spirits of saints are breathed up to Heaven by death:—so long be thou contented to have patience, and labour and be."

"But should the day ever come," shouted the Wind in return, "when the balance is reversed; when vice, only tolerated now, becomes triumphant; when sin reigns on the altars, and no man pulls it down; when the voice of the good man's worship is drowned in the bad man's scorn, and I cannot lift it to the skies; when the wretched curse God and die, and men have forgotten to be thankful;—then, then at last wilt thou acknowledge the justice of my complaints, and help me to pass away in peace? Promise this, and till then I will watch the struggle, and be contented to labour and to be."

And the Earth paused and consented, and the Wind fled satisfied away.

L'ENVOI TO THE READER.

And he is still careering round the world ; still gathering in “ the Voices of the Earth ; ” still watching the struggle between good and evil. In our public walks he meets us face to face. In our private chambers he is with us still. There is no secret corner where he cannot come ; no whisper which is not breathed into his ear. It behoves us well, then, to be careful, lest, by thoughtlessness or sin, we add weight to the wrong side of the scales. For if the balance should ever incline to evil, and the wind cease to blow, what *would* become of the world ?







THE MASTER OF THE HARVEST.



THE MASTER OF THE HARVEST.

"That which thou dost not understand when thou readest, thou shalt understand in the day of thy visitation; for there are many secrets of religion which are not perceived till they be felt, and are not felt but in the day of a great calamity."—JEREMY TAYLOR.



THE Master of the Harvest walked by the side of his corn-fields in the early year, and a cloud was over his face, for there had been no rain for several weeks, and the earth was hard from the parching of the cold east winds, and the young wheat had not been able to spring up.

So, as he looked over the long ridges that lay stretched in rows before him, he was vexed, and began to grumble, and say, "the harvest would be backward, and all things would go wrong." At the mere thought of which he frowned more and more, and uttered words of complaint against the heavens, because there was no rain; against the earth, because it was so dry and unyielding; against the corn, because it had not sprung up.

And the man's discontent was whispered all over the field, and all along the long ridges where the corn-seeds lay; and when it reached them they murmured out, "How cruel to complain! Are we not doing our best? Have we let one drop of moisture pass by unused, one moment of warmth come to us in vain? Have we not seized on every chance, and

striven every day to be ready for the hour of breaking forth? Are we idle? Are we obstinate? Are we indifferent? Shall we not be found waiting and watching? How cruel to complain!"

Of all this, however, the Master of the Harvest heard nothing, so the gloom did not pass away from his face. On the contrary, he took it with him into his comfortable home, and repeated to his wife the dark words, that all things were going wrong; that the drought would ruin the harvest, for the corn was not yet sprung.

And still thinking thus, he laid his head on his pillow, and presently fell asleep.

But his wife sat up for a while by the bedside, and opened her Bible, and read, "The harvest is the end of the world, and the reapers are the angels."

Then she wrote this text in pencil, on the fly-leaf at the end of the book, and after it the date of the day, and after the date the words, "Oh, Lord, the husbandman, Thou waitest for the precious fruit Thou hast sown, and hast long patience for it! Amen, O Lord, Amen!"

After which the good woman knelt down to pray, and as she prayed she wept, for she knew that she was very ill.

But what she prayed that night was heard only in heaven.

And so a few days passed on as before, and the house was gloomy with the discontent of its master; but at last, one evening, the wind changed, the sky became heavy with clouds, and before midnight there was rain all over the land; and when the Master of the Harvest came in next morning, wet from his early walk by the corn-fields, he said it was well it had come at last, and that, at last, the corn had sprung up.

On which his wife looked at him with a smile, and said, "How often things came right, about which one had been anxious and disturbed." To which her husband made no answer, but turned away and spoke of something else.

Meantime, the corn-seeds had been found ready and waiting

when the hour came, and the young sprouts burst out at once ; and very soon all along the long ridges were to be seen rows of tender blades, tinting the whole field with a delicate green. And day by day the Master of the Harvest saw them and was satisfied ; but because he was satisfied, and his anxiety was gone, he spoke of other things, and forgot to rejoice.

And a murmur arose among them,—“Should not the Master have welcomed us to life ? He was angry but lately, because the seed he had sown had not yet brought forth ; now that it has brought forth, why is he not glad ? What more does he want ? Have we not done our best ? Are we not doing it minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day ? From the morning and evening dews, from the glow of the midday sun, from the juices of the earth, from the breezes which freshen the air, even from clouds and rain, are we not taking in food and strength, warmth and life, refreshment and joy ; so that one day the valleys may laugh and sing, because the good seed hath brought forth abundantly ? Why does he not rejoice ?”

As before, however, of all they said the Master of the Harvest heard nothing ; and it never struck him to think of the young corn-blades’ struggling life. Nay, once, when his wife asked him if the wheat was doing well, he answered, “Very fairly,” and nothing more. But she then, because the evening was fine, and the fairer weather had revived her failing powers, said she would walk out by the corn-fields herself.

And so it came to pass that they went out together.

And together they looked all along the long green ridges of wheat, and watched the blades as they quivered and glistened in the breeze which sprang up with the setting sun. Together they walked, together they looked ; looking at the same things, and with the same human eyes ; even as they had walked, and looked, and lived together for years, but with a world dividing their hearts ; and what was ever to unite them ?

Even then, as they moved along, she murmured half-aloud, half to herself, thinking of the anxiety that had passed away,—

"Thou visitest the earth, and blessest it; thou makest it very plenteous."

To which he answered, if answer it may be called,—“Why are you always so gloomy? Why should Scripture be quoted about such common things?”

And she looked in his face and smiled, but did not speak; and he could not read the smile, for the life of her heart was as hidden to him as the life of the corn-blades in the field.

And so they went home together, no more being said by either; for, as she turned round, the sight of the setting sun, and of the young freshly-growing wheat-blades, brought tears into her eyes.

She might never see the harvest upon earth again; for her that other was at hand, whereof the reapers were to be angels.

And when she opened her Bible that night she wrote on the fly-leaf the text she had quoted to her husband, and after the text the date of the day, and after the date the words, “Bless me, even me also, oh my Father, that I may bring forth fruit with patience!”

Very peaceful were the next few weeks that followed, for all nature seemed to rejoice in the weather, and the corn-blades shot up till they were nearly two feet high, and about them the Master of the Harvest had no complaints to make.

But at the end of that time, behold, the earth began to be hard and dry again, for once more rain was wanted; and by degrees the growing plants failed for want of moisture and nourishment, and lost power and colour, and became weak and yellow in hue. And once more the husbandmen began to fear and tremble, and once more the brow of the Master of the Harvest was overclouded with angry apprehension.

And as the man got more and more anxious about the fate of his crops, he grew more and more irritable and distrustful, and railed as before, only louder now, against the heavens, because there was no rain; against the earth, because it lacked moisture; against the corn-plants, because they had waxed feeble.

Nay, once, when his sick wife reproved him gently, praying him to remember how his fears had been turned to joy before, he reproached her in his turn for sitting in the house and pretending to judge of what she could know nothing about, and bade her come out and see for herself how all things were working together for ill.

And although he spoke it in bitter jest, and she was very ill, she said she would go, and went.

So once more they walked out together, and once more looked over the corn-fields; but when he stretched out his arm, and pointed to the long ridges of blades, and she saw them shrunken and faded in hue, her heart was grieved within her, and she turned aside and wept over them.

Nevertheless she said she durst not cease from hope, since an hour might renew the face of the earth, if God so willed; neither should she dare to complain, *even if the harvest were to fail.*

At which words the Master of the Harvest stopped short, amazed, to look at his wife, for her soul was growing stronger as her body grew weaker, and she dared to say things now which she would have had no courage to utter before.

But of all this he knew nothing, and what he thought, as he listened, was, that she was as weak in mind as in body; and what he said was, that a man must be an idiot who would not complain when he saw the bread taken from under his very eyes!

And his murmurings and her tears sent a shudder all along the long ridges of sickly corn-blades, and they asked one of another, "Why does he murmur? and, Why does she weep? Are we not doing all we can? Do we slumber or sleep, and let opportunities pass by unused? Are we not watching and waiting against the times of refreshing? Shall we not be found ready at last? Why does he murmur? and, Why does she weep? Is she, too, fading and waiting? Has she, too, a master who has lost patience?"

Meantime, when she opened her Bible that night, she wrote on the fly-leaf the text, "Wherefore should a man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" and after the text the date of the day, and after the date the words, "Thou dost turn Thy face from us, and we are troubled: but, Lord, how long, how long?"

And by and by came on the long-delayed times of refreshing, but so slowly and imperfectly, that the change in the corn could scarcely be detected for a while. Nevertheless it told at last, and stems struggled up among the blades, and burst forth into flowers, which gradually ripened into ears of grain. But a struggle it had been, and continued to be, for the measure of moisture was scant, and the due amount of warmth in the air was wanting. Nevertheless, by struggling and effort the young wheat advanced, little by little, in growth; preparing itself, minute by minute—hour by hour—day by day, as best it could, for the great day of the harvest.—As best it could! Would the Master of the Harvest ask more? Alas! he had still something to find fault with, for when he looked at the ears and saw that they were small and poor, he grumbled, and said the yield would be less than it ought to be, and the harvest would be bad.

And as more weeks went on, and the same weather continued, and the progress was very, very slow, he spoke out his vexation to his wife at home, to his friends at the market, and to the husbandmen who passed by and talked with him about the crops.

And the voice of his discontent was breathed over the corn-field, all along the long ridges where the plants were labouring, and waiting, and watching. And they shuddered and murmured,—“How cruel to complain! Had we been idle, had we been negligent, had we been indifferent, we might have passed away without bearing fruit at all. How cruel to complain!”

But of all this the Master of the Harvest heard nothing, so he did not cease to complain.

Meantime another week or two went on, and people, as they glanced over the land, wished that a few good rainy days would come and do their work decidedly, so that the corn-ears might fill. And behold, while the wish was yet on their lips, the sky became charged with clouds, darkness spread over the country, a wild wind arose, and the growling of thunder announced a storm. And such a storm! People hid from it in cellars, and closets, and dark corners, as if now, for the first time, they believed in a God, and were trembling at the new-found fact; as if they could never discover Him in His sunshine and blessings, but only thus in His tempests and wrath.

And all along the long ridges of wheat-plants drove the rain-laden blast, and they bent down before it and rose up again, like the waves of a labouring sea. Ears over ears they bowed down; ears above ears they rose up. They bowed down, as if they knew that to resist was destruction: they rose up, as if they had a hope beyond the storm. Only here and there, where the whirlwinds were strongest, they fell down and could not lift themselves again. So the damage done was but little, and the general good was great. But when the Master of the Harvest saw here and there patches of over-weighted corn yet dripping from the thunder-showers, he grew angry for them, and forgot to think of the long ridges that stretched over his fields, where the corn-ears were swelling and rejoicing.

And he came in gloomy to his home, when his wife was hoping that now, at last, all would be well; and when she looked at him the tumult of her soul grew beyond control, and she knelt down before him as he sat moody in his chair, and threw her arms round him, and cried out—"It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not utterly consumed. Oh, husband! pray for the corn and for me, that it may go well with us at the last! Carry me upstairs!" And his anger was checked by fear, and he carried her upstairs and laid her on the bed, and said it must be the storm which had shaken her nerves. But whether he prayed for either the corn or her that night, she never knew.

And presently came a new distress ; for when the days of rain had accomplished their gracious work, and every one was satisfied, behold, they did not cease. And as hitherto the cry had gone up for water on the furrows, so now men's hearts failed them for fear lest it should continue to overflowing, and lest mildew should set in upon the full, rich ears, and the glorious crops should be lost.

And the Master of the Harvest walked out by his corn-fields, his face darker than ever. And he railed against the rain, because it would not cease ; against the sun, because it would not shine ; against the wheat, because it might perish before the harvest.

" But why does he always and only complain ? " moaned the corn-plants, as the new terror was breathed over the field. " Have we not done our best from the first ? And has not mercy been with us, sooner or later, all along ? When moisture was scant, and we throve but little, why did he not rejoice over that little, and wait, as we did, for more ? Now that abundance has come, and we swell, triumphant in strength and in hope, why does he not share our joy in the present, and wait, in trust, as we do, for the future ripening change ? Why does he always complain ? Has he himself some hard master, who would fain reap where he has not sown, and gather where he has not strawed, and who has no pity for his servants who strive ? "

But of all this the Master of the Harvest heard nothing. And when the days of rain had rolled into weeks, and the weeks into months, and the autumn set in, and the corn still stood up green in the ridges, as if it never meant to ripen at all, the boldest and most hopeful became uneasy, and the Master of the Harvest despaired.

But his wife had risen no more from her bed, where she lay in sickness and suffering, yet in patient trust ; watching the sky through the window that faced her pillow ; looking for the relief that came at last. For even at the eleventh hour, when hope seemed almost over, and men had half learned to submit

to their expected trial, the dark days began to be varied by a few hours of sunshine; and though these passed away, and the gloom and rain returned again, yet they also passed away in their turn, and the sun shone out once more.

And the poor sick wife, as she watched, said to those around her that the weather was gradually changing, and that all would come right at last; and sighing a prayer that it might be so with herself also, she had her Bible brought to the bed, and wrote in the fly-leaf the text, "Some thirty, some sixty, some an hundredfold;" and after the text the date of the day, for on that day the sun had been shining steadily for many hours. And after the date the words, "Unto whom much is given, of him shall much be required; yet if Thou, Lord, be extreme to mark iniquity, O Lord, who may stand?"

And day by day the hours of sunshine were more in number, and the hours of rain and darkness fewer, and by degrees the green corn-ears ripened into yellow, and the yellow turned into gold, and the harvest was ready, and the labourers not wanting. And the bursting corn broke out into songs of rejoicing, and cried, "At least we have not waited and watched in vain! Surely goodness and mercy have followed us all the days of our life, and we are crowned with glory and honour. Where is the Master of the Harvest, that he may claim his own with joy?"

But the Master of the Harvest was bending over the bed of his dying wife.

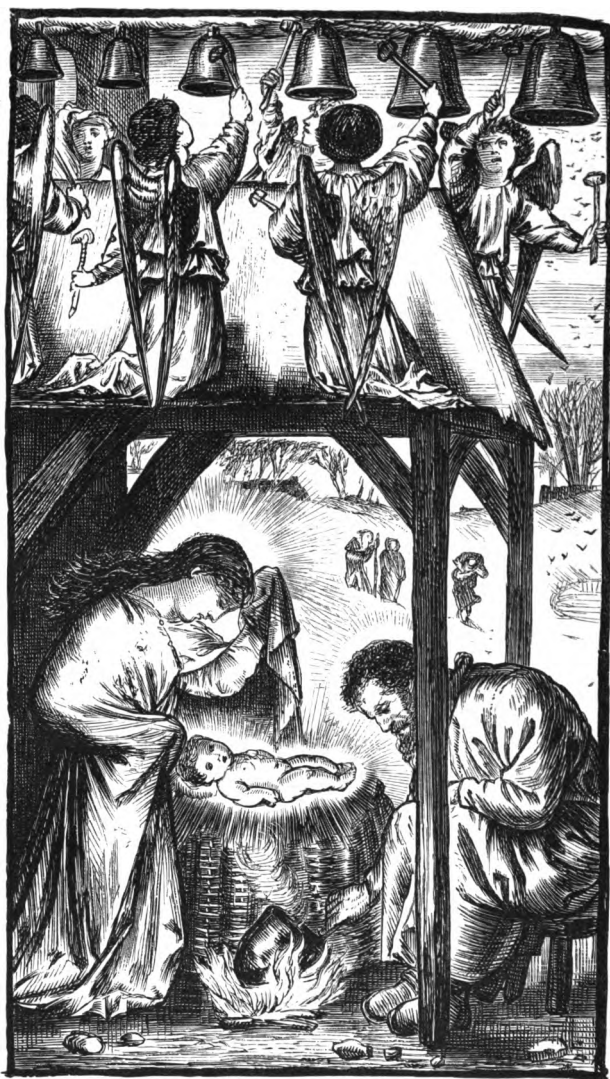
And she whispered that her Bible should be brought. And he brought it, and she said, "Open it at the fly-leaf at the end, and write, 'It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.'" And she bade him add the date of the day, and after the date of the day the words, "O Lord, in Thy mercy say of me—She hath done what she could!" And then she laid her hand in his, and so fell asleep in hope.

And the harvest of the earth was gathered into barns, and the gathering-day of rejoicing was over, and the Master of it all sat alone by his fire-side, with his wife's Bible on his knee. And he read the texts, and the dates, and the prayers, from the first day when the corn-seeds were held back by drought; and as he read, a new heart seemed to burst out within him from the old one—a heart which the Lord of the other Harvest was making soft, and the springing whereof he would bless.

And henceforth, in his going out and coming in from watching the fruits of the earth, the texts, and the dates, and the prayers were ever present in his mind, often rising to his lips; and he murmured and complained no more, let the seasons be what they would, and his fears however great; for the thought of the late-sprung-seed in his own dry cold heart, and of the long-suffering of Him who was Lord and Master of all, was with him night and day. And more and more as he prayed for help, that the weary struggle might be blessed, and the new-born watching and waiting not be in vain; so more and more there came over his spirit a yearning for that other harvest, where he, and she who had gone before, might be gathered in together.

And thus,—in one hope of their calling,—the long-divided hearts were united at last.





THE DELIVERER.



THE DELIVERER.

"Sages, leave your contemplations,
Brighter visions beam afar."—CHRISTMAS HYMN.

FOR years there had been abroad over the earth, a whisper that a Deliverer was about to arise: a Deliverer who had been promised from the earliest ages of the world. Some mighty man or king, some sage or conqueror, who would bring back lost justice, goodness, and happiness to the suffering race of men, and begin a reign of everlasting peace.

And the hearts of all whom the whisper reached, caught fire at the thought; for who so dull as not to know his own wretchedness, or not see that things around him might be better than they were? Ah! men knew it but too well. Death, sickness, the necessity of labour, labour bestowed in vain, wronged affections, the triumph of might over right, wars and tumults, household divisions, and the thousand other miseries of life, had from year to year in every age unfolded to each man in succession, as he awoke to reason, the strange, sad fact, that some prevailing disorder existed in the world in his own particular day; while at the same time a strong instinct in his soul told him, that it had not always been so,—would not be so for ever.

So the whisper of a Deliverer stole into all hearts with a promise of better things in store; but, obscure and indefinite, it was interpreted by many minds in as many different ways, according to the bent of different wishes and feelings. Only in one thing all agreed, namely, that at the advent of this Mighty One, sorrow and evil should flee away, and joy and peace be spread over the earth as the waters cover the sea.

A Deliverer!—what should he deliver them from, if not from the death so abhorrent to every instinct of their being; from the grinding sicknesses which made life a burden even to the young; from the toil that kept the strong man back from ease and enjoyment; from the disappointments which racked the tenderest and best emotions of their hearts; from the chains of unjust oppression; from the strife of parties and of tongues; from the weakness of their own souls, which left them a prey to evil imaginations from within and a thousand temptations from without?

Truly such life was but a weariness at the best: and “Oh for a Deliverer!” was the cry that went up from each man’s heart as his own particular burden bore him down. Oh that the everlasting doors were lifted up, that the King of Glory might come in, and touch the earth with some magic sceptre, restoring all things to order and joy!

But the name of the Mighty One was to be called “Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.” And the government was to be upon his shoulders, although he was to be a son, and born a child. Where, then, but in palaces could he be expected, or looked for; where but in palaces brought forth and nurtured? Surely, kings must be his nursing fathers and their queens his nursing mothers. Oh happy parents of a happy child!—who great enough, who high enough to be so favoured? Yet the child of these great ones was to be greater and mightier than all, to rule and triumph over all!—A King of kings, a Lord of lords! Well might the longing eyes of hope be fixed on palaces and

regal halls! Well might the murmured question arise, "Can this be He?" when the cry of a new-born prince was heard within their walls! What wonder if Sybil and Poet sang, by anticipation of His fame!

But ever as the children of these great ones grew up to manhood, they merged by the common lot of suffering and sin into common men, and hope was darkened: yet though darkened not extinguished—and the Deliverer was still looked for as before.

Some, however, there were, who found in the titles, "Wonderful, Counsellor," another meaning and another aim. Kingly the Deliverer might be by influence and character, but not necessarily in his human birth. The kingship of man's noblest faculty—Reason—might be at hand, to overthrow all kingships of mere blood; the triumph of mind over material things, the kingship of intellect over brute passion and force.

The poor wise man who saved the city, but had neither thanks nor honour for his pains, was a type of a state of things now at last about to pass away. And the midnight oil had not been wasted, nor the brain racked in vain, if this were so indeed: if the day and hour were at hand when He should be exalted as universal Counsellor, whom wisdom had made fit to rule; and He be called Wonderful who was great by the secrets of his mind.

And as Sages and Philosophers meditated on these things, there glowed in their bosoms aspirations which bordered on devotion. And they stretched out supplicating hands to the Unseen Ruler of all, asking that the Wonderful, the Counsellor, might bring them light and truth indeed, and conquer with those arms alone the ignorance and errors of the world.

Oh for the rising of that day, when the real majesty and power of the human mind should be revealed to the ignorant multitude in all its magnificence! Here is the only greatness worth the name! Here the only power fit for universal rule!

But year after year the wise man died as the fool, and his

children followed him, and neither among them had the Deliverer arisen, but must be looked for as before.

Again: "Prince of Peace!" mused others. In this, all is comprehended. The conquering spoken of is but the overcoming of all wish for strife; the rule in store, the sovereignty of love, suppressing all desires but that for universal joy.

Ah! surely, when the Deliverer came it would be to make all men happy alike, and pour a healing balsam into every wound! Then would all the old griefs be buried and forgotten, and the soothed minds of contented men trouble themselves no more with struggle and labour.

Oh for the dawning of that morn when each man should be king and kingdom to himself, and the world resound once more to the songs of rejoicing which gladdened the golden age! Had not the Sybils so spoken, and had not the Poet so sung? Then should every man sit under his own vine and his fig-tree, and poor and rich alike cease from the land, for all should be equal and all happy.

But whence should such a Deliverer be looked for—where be expected to arise?—Ah! surely only in some happy spot of Nature, some valley peaceful and beautiful as that of Cashmere, among a race of pastoral simplicity; in some perfect household, where disturbance was never known, and one mind prevailed. Thence alone could come He who would cause the cruel swords of war to be turned into ploughshares, and spears into reaping-hooks, and animate and inanimate nature to join in one general song of joy.

So these looked to the lovely valleys and the quiet nooks of Nature for the magic spot where discord had never entered. But they, too, looked and waited in vain—yet looked and waited on as before, and called upon Nature herself to confirm their hopes.

And the inanimate Earth awoke at last to the consciousness of some great approaching event, and listened to the whisper of deliverance, even as before she had suffered and sunk under the

ancient curse. And spring by spring, as she adorned herself in beauty, putting on verdure and flowers, the sense of the Mighty One who was to restore and renovate her lost glories swelled through every pulse. But she could not be troubled with the discordant expectations of men. . . . "Come as He will," she cried, "as King, as Conqueror, as Sage, as God: thus, thus, thus, in my bloom and beauty, do I make myself meet and ready for his advent; thus, thus, thus am I worthy to receive my Lord and King! When he comes shall not all the hills leap for joy, and the valleys laugh and sing, and the trees of the forest rejoice?"

So spring after spring she adorned herself in hope, and, summer after summer, she glowed with longing expectation; but spring and summer fled away and no Deliverer had come. And when the sap must return back again to the roots of trees and plants; and flowers and leaves decay, and a torpor as of death prevail over them for a while, she wept tears of regret while they took sad leave of each other, but said—"With a new season there will be hope once more." And Earth echoed the words, but, cold and desolate, she felt no confidence, and showed no signs of hope. Only the Evergreens cheered her up, for said they, "While better things cannot be had, be contented with us; at any rate we will remind you of what is to come."

Oh ignorant man and ignorant earth alike! While darkness was over the mind of one, and deadness over the face of the other—when the eyes of the common world were fixed on earthly palaces, and the thoughts of the wise on the fruits of earthly wisdom; yea, when the lovers of pleasure hoped for a Deliverer in scenes of earthly enjoyment—behold, God had chosen "the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; . . . the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; . . . and base things of the world, and things which are despised," had He chosen, "that no flesh should glory in His presence."

Turn aside your eyes from earthly grandeurs, ye prisoners of hope! Put away from your hearts the confidence of human wisdom! Generation after generation had passed away, and the whole world lay yet in wickedness, for "in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God;" and not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called by Him.

And then, lo! in the stable of a village inn, where the beasts of the field were wont to take their rest, a weary foot-worn maiden had lain down for shelter and ease, for no other room could be found. And hark to the cry of a new-born babe which rose thence, unnoticed by the busy world without! The first-born of a mother, whose husband earned their bread by daily toil—what mattered this common birth to other men? Yet—hark to another cry which went up amidst the wailings of the lowly child: a cry of thanksgiving and praise. "Glory be to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men." "Unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord!" And they who sang this glad Hosanna were the angels of Heaven!

Oh, day of glory and delight! the Deliverer had come at last; the day of redemption was there; but what was the sign whereby the long-expected Mighty One might be known? Had kings at last given birth to him? Had sages at last found him?

Nay!—to simple shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night, was the news declared, amidst the shining of the glory of the Lord; and the sign whereby He was to be known, was, that He should be found wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger.

Oh, ignorant man and ignorant earth alike! When the cry of that helpless infant broke forth in the shed of the village inn, who, untaught of Heaven, could have dreamt, that at that moment, and thus, the Desire of all nations had come among men?

Yet thus, thus, thus, in the counsels of God it was decreed it should be! Thus at His first coming He should come, an Example to all men.

Aye! thus, thus, thus—in poverty and lowliness. Thus, thus, thus—while Nature lay torpid and hopeless, and half the world was winter-wrapt in snow. Thus, thus, thus—with healing on his wings, but not the healing they sought for: not a deliverance from death or sorrow, not a freedom from toil or pain, not even a ransom from temptation and sin; but, behold, by the strength and wisdom of God's right hand, and the power of His holy Spirit, to make men through all these things "more than conquerors."

We strive after signs and wonders, we look for visible manifestations, we long for sensible experiences, and when unanswered we fall back without a hope; but how often, and often, and often, must the lesson of the Advent be repeated. Not always where and how we look for Him does the Divine One make His presence known to ourselves. Not always even when we are hopeful and earnest. Not always when in confidence we cry, "Thus, thus, thus, am I meet to receive my Lord and King," does He come indeed.

Then hang up the holly, the ivy and the yew, over the Christmas snows, as memorials of a hope which human reason could never teach. Not by the glories of summer was the Comforter ushered into the world. In the season of cold and of darkness He came to His own. In the winter and humiliation of our souls, when the robes of earthly righteousness have been laid aside, it may be He will draw near again. When learning and research cannot find Him, it may be He will reveal Himself to the simple in heart. When the expectations of great men perish, He may come with healing on His wings to the soul of the lowly and meek.





INFERIOR ANIMALS.



INFERIOR ANIMALS.

"How? when? and whence? The gods give no reply.
Let so it suffice, and cease to question why."

GOETHE.

WHAT do they say?—what do they say?—what do they say?—

What can they *have* to say, those noisy, cawing rooks, as they sail along the sky over our heads, gathering more and more friends as they go on to the appointed place of meeting?

What have *they* to say?—What have *we* to say, they may equally ask. They have life, and labour, and food, and children to say their say about; and if they do not say it in what we are pleased to call language, they say it in a way intelligible to each other, which is all that is wanted.

That they do understand each other's say is clear, for they are collecting from far and near in large numbers for a definite object, viz., that of assembling in some field, or open pasturage, or park, where they will settle down together for upwards of an hour, and walk or hop about, as if they had serious thoughts of giving up flying altogether, and taking to an earthly life; saying a say, all the while, whereof we are altogether as ignorant as they would be of ours round a large dinner-table, if they had the opportunity of hearing it.

We call their say noisy cawing; what they would call ours round the large dinner-table one cannot guess; but, if they concluded it had no meaning, because they did not happen to understand it, their judgment would not be worth much.

As to the noises, there is not much to choose between them in the manner of agreeableness. Nay, of the two, perhaps the din produced by human voices is the more discordant and confused.

If you never thought of this before, O reader, think of it now, and take an early opportunity of listening, and judging for yourself. Listen, not as listening to the meaning of what is uttered, but to the mass of noise as mere noise. Listen to it, as you might imagine a rook to do, ignorant of human speech, and judging only of the hubbub of sounds; and then own to yourself—for conscience will force you so to do—that there is neither sweetness nor sublimity, neither melody nor majesty, in the shouting, and piping, and whistling, and hissing, and barking, of closely intermixed human voices and laughter.

Alas, for the barriers which lie so mysteriously between us and the other creatures among whom we are born, and pass our short existence upon earth!—Alas!—for a desire for intercommunication is one of the strong instincts of our nature, and yet it is one which, as regards all the rest of creation but our human fellow-beings, we have to unlearn from babyhood.

See the little child as she babbles to her cat on the rug, and would fain be friends with the soft plaything. Observe in every action how she expects it to understand her, and return her love. Look at the angry disappointment, if a vicious bite or scratch disturb the security of the affectionate dream. It is not pain alone the child feels, let the matter-of-fact observer say what he will: there is the vexation of hurt feelings as well. Puss should not have behaved so to her; puss, with whom she had so gladly shared her breakfast of milk; puss, whom she had nursed on her knee; puss, who must have known how much she loved her!

And then follows the lesson:—it may have been given before, but it has to be given again; and while mamma tells her little one that poor pussy does not know what she means, cannot hear what she says, cannot talk as she can, has no sense to know how much she loves her, and therefore is not to blame for biting, although she must be slapped when she does it, to make her remember not to do it again;—behold! how the wistful eyes of the listening child haze over with a dull dreaminess as she becomes more and more perplexed. It is all far too puzzling for her to understand, and when she turns again to puss—as if by looking at her to make it out—lo! the veil between the two natures remains as thick as before; neither the bite, nor any thing else, has been explained.

But, practically, the unlearning of the instinct has begun, and so, practically, the lesson goes on, until we get so used to it, we forget it was ever a lesson at all; and only a few of us, here and there in grown-up life, are haunted, as they stand among the lower forms of creation, by a painful wonder at the gulph which lies between.

That the lower should not fully understand the higher; that *they* should not understand *us*, is comprehensible enough; nay, is a necessity involved in the very idea of a lower and higher; let the philosophers rave as they will at the chains thereby hung around their own necks. But that the higher should not fully understand the lower; that *we* should not fully understand *them*, is a mystery indeed, and one of which no solution has been offered.

What more natural than that the dog should not know much about his master? What more strange than that the master should know so little of his dog? In one sense, of course, he knows all about him, *i. e.*, the uses he can put him to, and what he may expect from him; but of the inner world of the dog's life, his feelings and motives of action, he knows almost nothing. Nay, even of his physical capabilities he has no complete idea. Who has ever explained by what power a dog will

take a short cut across the country, to the house where his master is, although he has never been the road before? or why he never, even by any accident or mistake, brings back any but the stone his master threw—thrown, perhaps, with a gloved hand, and into wet meadow grass, and not found for several minutes?

Verily, in more than one sense, we are “strangers and pilgrims upon earth;” for, from the first moment of waking to conscious thought, we find ourselves in a country where all utterances but our own are to us a blank; all the creatures strange; all life unintelligible, both in its beginning and its end: all the present, as well as the past and future, a mystery.

“Only children, or child-like men,” says Novalis, “have any chance of breaking through the charm which holds nature thus as it were frozen around us, like a petrified magic city.” Oh, if this be true, who would not be a child again? Reader, can you hear this and remain unmoved, or shall you and I become children in heart once more? Come! own with me how hateful were the lessons which undeceived us from our earlier instincts of faith and sweet companionship with all created things: and let us go forth together, and for a while forget such teaching.

Hand in hand, in the dear confiding way which only children use, let us go forth into the fields, and read the hidden secrets of the world. Clasp mine firmly as I clasp yours. See, there is magic in the action itself! So we placed our hands in those of our parents; so our children love to place theirs in our own. So, then, even so, let us two walk trustingly and lovingly together for a while, and join again the broken threads of old feelings, wishes, friendships, and hopes.

* * * * *

Hush! is it a parliament, or a congregation, or what, that darkens over yonder field? Are rook-politics, or rook-faith, or rook domestic hopes and fears, the subjects of that everlasting

cawing, those restless movements, those hoppings and peckings, and changes of position?

Cower down here with me by this hole in the hedge;—let us lean against this old elm-root and look through. See! the honeysuckle is twined in the thorn above our heads, and is giving out its scent around us, as if to bid us welcome.

Oh, dear companion, do you see the dark glossy creatures at their play? *Their play*? am I not bold to say so? They have come here for some object,—with some distinct intention and purpose. Yonder, in the tall oak that overlooks the field in the opposite corner, I see the sentinel guard, who will never stir from his post, until the assembly has dispersed, unless he hears or sees symptoms of danger or interruption, and then he will dash out and fly among them, making his warning cry, so different from all others, that any one who has once heard it, will recognise it again. We must whisper our remarks very softly then, or it may give notice of our presence here, and all the flock may forsake the field.

How solemn and grave, yet how keen and attentive he looks! How patient and observant! Contented not to join the fun himself, so that he may but promote it. Unselfish, dark watchman, are you paid for your trouble, and if so, how? Or do you do it out of love and affection for your brethren, expecting love and affection from them in return, on some future occasion, when one of them will watch, and you be allowed to play? Play, I still say; but can this be only play indeed? Surely something graver and more important than play must have brought these different companies and families from their often distant homes, to this spot?

Alas! how vain are my questionings! nature remains mute around me, and man is ignorant and unable to answer. Yes! ignorant and unable to answer, let him say what he will.

Hear this, oh you philosophers,—you lights of the world, with your books and papers and diagrams, and collected facts, and self-confidence unlimited! You who turn the bull's eye of

your miserable lanthorns upon isolated corners of the universe, and fancy you are sitting in the supreme light of creative knowledge! Hear this; you are ignorant and unable to answer; or disprove it if you can, by showing me that you do know this one simple thing which puzzles me now! Tell me what the rooks are doing and saying; those inferior animals about whom you, in your wisdom, ought to know every thing. Tell me that, and I will own that your eyes have been opened indeed, and that you are as gods, knowing good and evil.

Tell me what these grand assemblies are for; tell me how they are called; tell me how they are conducted; tell me by what message the distant colonies are warned of the particular spot and hour of meeting. Tell me by what rules the place is chosen. Tell me how the messenger is instructed. Tell me by what means he delivers his message. Tell me why they meet on level ground and walk like men, and not rather in their own deep woods, where they might fly and roost on branches, and run no danger, and need no guard?

Tell me what do they say, what do they say, what do they say, when they meet at last, and whether they are there for business or for play. Tell me these things, and then I will listen to you when you point out to me the counsels and the workings of the Creator of rooks and men.

But, miserable guides, miserable comforters are ye all! Better a thousand times to be a child as I am now, lying under this twining honeysuckle, and listening reverently to the unknown murmurs in the field! But oh! twining honeysuckle, why do you breathe out only scent around me? Stoop, stoop, stoop! I know you know! Why not whisper in my ear, then, what they say?

Tell me, what do they say? Childlike I ask, childlike must I always ask in vain?

But hush for a moment! some one speaks; some stranger interrupts us already!—calls, “gentlemen!” as if gentlemen were here. Oh! go, go, go, whoever you may be. There

are no *gentlemen* here—only children: children for one brief hour of weary grown-up life. Leave us; let us dream our dream in peace.

But how is this? I see no one near, yet the voice is louder than before. Companion, where are you? Look! There is no disturbance in the field; the sentry sits firm at his post; the rest are hopping, pecking, jumping as before; and yet I hear—oh, what do I hear?—a voice—and from among the rooks themselves! Have my senses left me, or have I received another? Any how the spell is broken at last, and language, language, language, resounds on every side! Quick, then, my tablets! Let me record what I see and hear.

One among them comes forward—a crowd surrounds him—he is congratulated—he inclines his head—he thanks his friends for a reception so far beyond his merits or his hopes. . . . Oh, folly! are they aping the mockeries of men? Wait! he is serious once more, and here on my tablets I record,

WHAT THE ROOK SAYS.

“The origin, therefore, of these creatures,—these men,—whom we equally fear and dislike, is decidedly the most useful of all subjects of study. How can it be otherwise? Their treatment of us, and our feelings to them, can never be placed on a proper footing, until we know something of the nature of the people themselves. In fact, my friends, I base my whole inquiry upon these two assumptions; first, that it is *desirable* to ascertain the exact truth on the subject; secondly, that it is *possible* to ascertain the exact truth upon *any* subject, if one chooses to try.

“Whoever goes along with me on these points, will be so good as to rise from the ground by a hop, and give a caw. . . .

. . . “Thank you, thank you, gentlemen, for your applause! My recognition of our common capabilities is acceptable to you, I perceive. Unlimited faith in them is indeed the key-

stone of all enquiry. . . . Thank you, thank you, once more !”

—But I—the transcriber of this arrogant nonsense—am ready, as I listen to their senseless caws, to throw down my tablets in despair. Oh ! to think of finding the false glozings of philosophical conceit among the birds of the air, and as welcome as . . . but hush ! he speaks again.

“ *How*, *when*, *whence*, and *why*, then, are the questions we must put and learn to answer. *How* came this creature in the land, and *whence*? *when* was he first our foe, and *why*? *Why* also is he here at all ?

“ These are difficult questions indeed, and before we answer them, let us look at the facts of the case. Unhappily they are too well known to need much description. It is, and has been from time immemorial (I have made inquiry of our oldest relations), a system of encroachment on one side, and giving way on the other. He comes near us and we fly ; he pursues us again, and again we retire before him. Old solitudes and woodland homes are invaded, and made public ; and we seek fresh retreats, only to be driven out afresh. It is a terrible position, and a time will certainly come when we must seek a new world, or cease to exist, unless some remedy for the threatened evil can be found.

“ Now, the *WHY* of our yielding our place to man is *fear*. We can none of us deny it : a cowardly terror which seems to have possessed our race as far back as our oldest grandsires can recollect.

“ But the *WHY* of this *fear*? What is that? Well ! I am told on all sides that it is our sense of man’s superiority to ourselves. Hence we succumb, overawed by his presence. And here I will at once confess, that I was for a long time myself as firm a believer in this old tradition as any of you can be at the present moment. When I beheld ancient woods deserted, ancient homes forsaken, how could I fail to tremble before him who, I was told, was the mighty cause of such disturbance ?

But thanks to the awakened spirit of inquiry, I emerged at last from the labyrinth of what I now believe to be an old wife's tale.

"The *why* of our giving way, was *fear*: that was obvious enough; the *why* of the fear, man's superiority. So it was said, at least; but of this, *what proofs?* was my next demand; and no one could give me an answer! Here was a position for an intelligent creature! Every thing mysterious, unknown, and taken for granted; nothing proved. I shouted for proofs till I was hoarse, but every one turned away silent. Who can wonder, then, that my next inquiry implied a *doubt*. *Is* man superior to ourselves after all? No one can show me the fact by proofs. May not this old tradition then be a mere myth? the delusion of timid minds imposed upon weak ones for truth? My friends! the moment when I asked myself these questions was the turning-point of my life. Henceforth I resolved to inquire and investigate for myself, and the result of my labours I am going to place before you.

"Yet, lest you should accuse me also of mere assertion-making, let me guide you into examining the facts of the matter fairly for yourselves.

"Now all common observation is against the superiority of man. While we fly swiftly through the sky, behold him creeping slowly along the ground. While we soar to the very clouds, a brief jump and come down again is all his utmost efforts can accomplish, though I have seen him practising to get higher and higher, in his leaps, as if at a game. And at all times, if one of his legs is up, the other is obliged to be down, or the superior creature would be apt to tumble on his nose. Yet it is always in this miserable lop-sided manner he moves from place to place, unless he can get some other being, more skilful than himself, to carry him along.

"Again, while we are clothed in a natural thick, glossy plumage, available equally for summer or winter, behold man, not possessing in himself the means of protection against any sort

of weather whatever ! Neither the warmth of summer nor the cold of winter suit his uncomfortable skin. In all seasons he must wear *clothes*. Clumsy incumbrances, with which he is driven by a sad necessity to supply the place of the feathers or fur, with which every other creature on earth but himself is blessed. What sort of superiority is this ?

“ One more instance out of many, and I shall have said enough for the present. It is one, the force of which every philosophical mind will appreciate. While *we* are satisfied with ourselves and all around us, man is ever discontented and uneasy, seeking rest in everlasting change, but neither finding it himself, nor allowing it to others, as we know to our bitter cost.

“ Ah, my friends, if restless dissatisfaction be a proof of superiority, who would not be glad to be an inferior animal ?

“ Now then, have I shaken the old faith in the old tradition ? If so, you will be better disposed to accept the new one. Whoever is satisfied of this, let him soar from the ground and give a caw ! ”

—What a rising of dark forms in the air ; what an outburst of caws ! Verily 'tis a beautiful language after all, and beautiful creatures they are themselves ! Only I am not sure I do not like them better so, than in the would-be wisdom of men. Yes ! if they had but the sense not to sit in judgment upon things beyond their power ! . . . But hush ! he speaks again.

“ One objection remains to be answered. It was suggested by a keen-sighted friend, now, I am proud to say, a warm supporter of my views. In some of the unmannerly invasions of our premises already alluded to, painful events occur. While standing under our roosting trees, these creatures, men, will occasionally level at us sticks, of the most contemptible size, but which, owing to some contrivance which I have not at present had the time to investigate, make suddenly an abominable banging noise and a very unpleasant smoke. And no sooner do our youngsters see and hear all this, than some of them are

pretty sure to fall down upon the ground, as if crouching at the very feet of our foe. All fathers of families here present will admit the truth of this description, and know the terrible result. The prostrate young ones are carried away unresisting, and are never heard of more.

“ Now this has actually been brought forward as a proof of the superiority of man ; though in what way wanton cruelty proves superiority, I confess I am unable to see. But what cannot we flatter ourselves we have proved, when our minds are warped by a theory ! I, looking at the fact with an unprejudiced eye, see in it nothing but the miserable fruits of a delusion encouraged through so long a succession of ages, that we have transmitted to our very offspring an inheritance of paralysing fear ! For, observe, it is rarely—very rarely the grown-up bird who is the victim of this terror. Only the tender and susceptible young ones, who have had no experience of life to counteract the insane cowardice, which our obstinate adherence to the old wife’s tale has bequeathed to their constitutions.

“ Enough of this. I pass now to the pleasanter part of my task ! The statement of a theory respecting the origin of men, which affords a beautiful and consistent explanation of all the puzzling facts we have been considering, and opens up a vista of triumph to the whole rook race ! ”

—Mercy ! what thunders of applause !—I am deafened, but curiosity is awakened at last.—What folly !—Yet if ingenuity were wisdom . . . Well, well, if it were, judges would be overruled by barristers, and a thousand unjust verdicts become law. Again he opens his bill . . .

“ My friends, man is not our superior, was never so, for he is neither more nor less than a degenerated brother of our own race ! Yes, I venture confidently to look back thousands on thousands of generations, and I see that *men* were once *rooks* ! Like us they were covered with feathers, like us lived in trees, flew instead of walking, roosted instead of squatting in stone boxes, and were happy and contented as we are now !

“ This is a bold proposition, and I do not ask you to assent to it at once. But if on testing it in various ways, you are forced to admit that by it you are able to explain things hitherto inexplicable, and to account for things otherwise unaccountable, then I insist that though ocular proof cannot be had, you cannot reasonably reject my solution, without offering me a better one in exchange. *If things are not so, how are they?* is the ground I stand upon. For remember we have already laid down the maxim, that every thing *ought* to be and *can* be explained.

“ Well! here then I advance another step forward. I give an explanation (supported of course by facts), and I challenge you either to accept it, or to answer the searching inquiry, ‘ *If things are not so, how are they?* ’ Gentlemen who see the justice of this remark, will, perhaps, afford me a congratulatory caw.

“ Almost unanimous, I declare! and my venerable friends who hesitate—well, well—it is from the young I look for support. A natural distaste to disturbance of ideas comes on with declining years. Thank you, gentlemen, again; the voices of my young supporters are loud and impressive.”

—Oh, birds of the air, the world and the vanities and follies of it are as deep in your hearts as in ours! But again he resumes.—

“ The test I begin with is this. *Supposing* that my theory be true, and that men are degenerated rooks, what would be the condition of their minds, what their feeling and conduct towards us, the original race? Would not the painful sense of degradation, in the first place, cause them to be restless and uneasy with their present condition, as in fact we see they are? And would it not, in the second place, stimulate them to an incessant craving for re-association—a desire to be with us, among us, of us, and like us, once more? What more natural then, than that they should pursue us with almost tiresome pertinacity (a fact inexplicable on the theory of man’s superiority), and that when we retreat before them in fear, they should still

follow us, not, however, as we have for so long imagined, with evil intent, but with the outstretched arms of love ?

“ My friends, I feel the moisture tremble in my eyes at the thought of the gross misconceptions we have cherished with respect to this much maligned human race. How cruel, how cold we must have appeared to them ! How heartless—pardon my emotion ! . . . Give me encouragement by an approving caw.” . . .

—Louder than ever, only hoarse with suppressed emotion. The dream of nonsense is becoming real and exciting ! He speaks—

“ And now, even for the terrible loss of our young ones, an explanation dawns ; and their probable fate becomes clear ; and happily it is one, of which, in the midst of parental regrets, we cannot but be proud. Yes ! I boldly picture to myself those lost young ones, carried away to become the friends and instructors of the race we have dreaded as enemies. I do not hesitate to imagine them tenderly nursed and watched in the stone boxes into which we cannot see, but which they inhabit as homes—every movement an object of interest to their captors, every action creating admiration, and made a subject of imitation—and I see no improbability in the picture ! For if, as I shall presently show by unanswerable proofs, men are imitating not only our appearance, but our very customs and manners, their being able to do so can only be attributed to the instructions imparted to them, whether by example or precept, by our own offspring—for who else can have taught them ? Ages may pass away before the re-union of the two races takes place, but when it does (and I look forward to it in confident faith), it will be our own children who will have been the means of bringing the long-parted brethren together : those children who once fell down in fear at the feet of men, and over whose fate, hitherto, the veil of an impenetrable mystery has been thrown. My friends, it is my proud delight at this moment to lift that veil, and reveal to the affectionate mourners the bright and pleasurable reality !

“ And thus the mysteries of man’s pursuit, and apparent ill-usage of us, become in the light of my theory natural and intelligible facts. But you have a right to reply. ‘ Clear as all this *would* be, if the thing itself *could* be; *that* still remains to be shown. By what possible means could birds ever degenerate into men?’

“ Nothing can be more reasonable than the inquiry; nothing more conclusive I believe than the explanation I am able to give.

“ At this very moment, then, my friends, we are ourselves living examples of a first step in the same direction! Here we are assembled from all quarters of the country, having deserted our trees and woods, to meet in an open field, as men meet; walk lopsided as they walk, with one leg up and the other down; or jump in short hops instead of using our wings. What account can we give of this? To descend to the earth for a few moments for food, sticks, or wool, as they are needed, is one thing; to prolong our stay upon it, as we do now, is a matter of dangerous choice. Alas! indolence and a fatal tendency to yield to the ease of the moment, are the causes of our own conduct; and so they were, I can have no doubt whatever, of the degradation of our ancestors. Ages indeed may pass away without any perceptible effect being produced upon the individuals of a race, by the bad habits in which all are indulging. In fact, where a gradual change is creeping over all, it attracts the attention of none. But heap ages upon ages, and other ages upon them, in a succession to which the century-lives of our grandfathers are a tiny fraction of time, and what then? Anything is possible in the course of such a period. Can any one disprove what I say? If so, let him caw it publicly out; if not, let him hold his tongue. You are silent: I perceive that you assent.

“ Now, then, let us imagine a race of bygone rooks, less energetic even than ourselves; nay, we will, if you please, imagine them with some temporary weakness in their wings

(such deviations from a general standard are quite possible), and indulging gradually more and more in the relief afforded to the evil by this pernicious habit of ground-walking. There seems to me to be no great difficulty in believing that a weakness so indulged should gain ground in proportion to the extent of the indulgence, until, in the course of the long ages alluded to, and by many inheritances of increased want of power, the mischief, once trifling, became insurmountable, and a race incapable of using their wings at all, arose.

“Now, it is well known to you all, by observation of our young ones, that wings grow by use. After the young brood make efforts at flying, those necessary appendages increase. Thus much therefore is clear. Practice brings power, and power brings on growth and enlargement. And, in a similar manner, want of practice brings a falling away of strength, and diminution in size. Why then should there be any insuperable difficulty in further believing it possible that the never-used and consequently constantly diminishing wings of generation after generation, should disappear at last entirely as wings, leaving only the outer bone remaining, as a sort of claw whereby to lay hold on what was wanted—bared of all its beauty and ornament,—in fact, the long uncouth arm of the present man?

“And I can hardly doubt that in a similar manner, the other unused feathers on back and breast and legs, would also gradually fail. No air blowing through them, no freedom of action, no battling with the breeze. On the contrary, a stuffy life in close stone boxes, inclosed on all sides. Well might wings diminish in size, and feathers decrease in quantity, until at length, in the naked, claw-armed, bare-legged creature, not a trace of them could be found!

“Every probability is in favour of such a result, provided you only allow time enough for the imperceptible action of the change.

“And now reflect upon the miserable creature presented to your imagination! Enlarged, it is true, in length, for his lazy

habits encourage that sort of feeble growth; and the power which once produced feathers, must needs develop in some other form! But behold him—a featherless, thin-skinned biped—neither beast, nor bird, nor fish; wandering, shivering over the face of the earth, needing help from every other creature around him, yet never satisfied with any thing he gets! Need I fill up the picture further, or will not every one recognize at once in this miserable animal the portrait of the superior being, **MAN!**”

—Well may the listeners caw! well may they wheel round and round in exulting flight. I myself grow giddy and confused. Am I then half convinced?—Yet for an imperfect being to hope to fathom the higher nature? Bah! what balderdash of folly! But hark, he has begun afresh.—

“That such a degeneration is possible is therefore clear; and of the thousand difficulties cleared away by the establishment of this fact, I will offer you one more.

“You must all admit that one of the most puzzling *whys* in connection with man, is, *why he wears clothes?*—a habit which viewing him as a perfect animal, it would be impossible to account for, but which, on the contrary, considering him as a degenerated one, is just what might be expected. He had his natural clothes once, like the rest of the animals of the earth; he has lost them now, through the disease of his deterioration, and must supply himself with the miserable make-shifts of dress.

“My friends, time does not allow me to give you now more than a few examples of my collection of proofs, the extent of which is enormous; for even after my own convictions were fixed for ever by the discoveries I have already named, I never relaxed in my researches; but being unable to be personally in more places than one at a time, I employed in active investigations several distinguished friends; I will mention particularly Mr. Raven-wing, Mr. Yellow-beak, and Mr. Grey-leg. Furnished with a complete understanding of what I believed

and wished to be proved, these gentlemen have been unremitting in their efforts to procure corroborative facts; of which therefore I will, before I conclude, mention a few of the most striking.

“Mr. Raven-wing’s particular line was to find evidence of attempts on the part of man to recover the colour of the original race, namely, *black*; and to this end he did not shrink even from the distasteful task of approaching those vast masses of men’s stone boxes, which they call cities, towns, or villages, in order that he might observe the proceedings of their inhabitants. And he came back to me absolutely overwhelmed with what he had met with. *Black* in all the streets struggling to overpower every other hue. *Black* quiescent on the pavements and walls. *Black* rising triumphantly into the air from the mouths of those smaller boxes, which are placed on the summit of the larger ones, apparently to raise their height—of which singular fact I shall have more to say by-and-bye.

“*Black* also the usual colour of the coverings with which men protect their heads from the outer air. *Black* even the clumsy boots which cover their feet. *Black* pretty nearly everything, everywhere, Mr. Raven-wing positively declared.

“And on another occasion, in some parts of the country, he came upon whole races of men who left their homes every morning at an early hour, *white*, but returned to them every evening *black*, having accomplished this transformation during the course of the day. But by what means this significant change was effected, he could not precisely ascertain; for the places to which these creatures resorted for the purpose were either deep holes in the earth, into which they descended, and soon disappeared from sight, or large dark enclosures, full of fire and heat and smoke, into which no bird could follow them and live; so that all he knew of them was that every thing there being black, people became blackened who remained there long enough. Alas! what sufferings men endure in their struggles to become like ourselves, it is pitiful to reflect upon!

And the repetition of the endurance is not the least remarkable fact of the case. For unhappily the desired result appears to last for only the period of one day. These men emerge from their stone boxes next morning, pallid as before, again to go forth to similar haunts, and undergo the same tortures, to bring back for the same short time the coveted colour to their cheeks!

“All these circumstances, gentlemen, fell under Mr. Raven-wing’s personal observation, and of them, therefore, no doubt can be entertained. But it is fair to tell you also, that he did, in the course of his travels, hear of another class of facts, highly corroborative of these, but of which, as depending upon hearsay evidence, I cannot so positively speak. That hearsay evidence went to show that there are, already existing in the world, a class of men whose black colour remains with them for life,—nay, who transmit it to their offspring, so effectual have been the means used by their ancestors in acquiring it! Singular and interesting as this circumstance is, if true, I do not wish to dwell upon it. Imperfect evidence is the one thing in the world on which no fair inquirer likes to build.

“On the other hand, Mr. Yellow-beak’s mission was to obtain proofs of man’s endeavour to resume his life in *trees*; and of this some very interesting instances were adduced. In the same cities or towns which were the seat of Mr. Raven-wing’s investigations, Mr. Yellow-beak discovered narrow, upright, and very much elongated brick boxes, no thicker than the stems of our large trees, and in many cases strongly resembling them in formation, only destitute altogether of branches and leaves. And out of the tops of these Mr. Yellow-beak noticed to issue those same columns of black *smoke*, as he was told it was called, which Mr. Raven-wing had observed before, and which is evidently one of the many contrivances by which man is endeavouring after a restoration to the appearances of his lost primeval state.

“Indeed, my esteemed and acute friend satisfied himself that

there was, at the present day, going on among men, a series of systematic and unremitting efforts for a return to the lost forests and the original condition; of which efforts these stem-like buildings furnish a notable example. Let some ingenious plan be devised for the construction of branches on each side, and there can be no possible reason why men should not, in the course of time—but, mark me—I *do* say in the course of time—roost in these brick trees, as they did of yore in the natural ones. In fact, that this will eventually take place, and that men will make their homes in the branched chimneys of cities, I see no difficulty in supposing; nor that this will be one most powerful step towards a return to the common interests and hopes between ourselves and them.

“Mr. Grey-legs’ information was of a miscellaneous character. He was out early one morning, near a large village, and having fixed his attention on one of those smaller boxes usually placed on the others to raise the height of the building, he all at once observed emerging from its mouth a living creature. My friends, it is a solemn and important fact that this creature was *black all over*. Black as a black feather coat could have made him. *Black* in his skin, *black* in his clothes, *black* in the arm which lifted itself up and waved round and round, triumphantly, something also black, and more like a bird’s feather than any thing else. The gesture was triumphant, and the voice scarcely less so,—Sweep-o-oh! Sweep-oh! Sweep-oh! Some feeble attempt, we may suppose, at a return to the caw of their better days, yet, in its monotony, indicating a common origin of language.

“Mr. Grey-legs’ observations were especially valuable, however, in his discovery of more than one place near great towns, in which attempts are frequently made, on the part of our poor degenerate brothers, towards bringing to perfection a substitute for the lost power of soaring in the air. Clumsy as the machine or *balloon* used for this purpose is, the mere fact of its invention forms one of the most invaluable links in the chain of evidence

of man's determination to return as soon as possible to the habits and manners of his forefathers. Weary of his degradation, he is, no doubt, at the very moment we are avoiding and fearing him, longing to make known to us his sense of his misery, and to obtain assistance and hope for the future. But, among other things, the total loss of our language, consequent upon a long cessation of intercourse, remains as an almost insuperable difficulty between us. The sounds he emits now from his bill-less mouth are, in truth, an unmeaning jargon, to which it is absolutely painful to listen. It serves his present necessities, we may presume, as orders seem to be given and taken between one individual and another; but beyond this it is mere jaw, and jaw, with as little music in it as meaning.

"There is, in fact, '*neither sweetness nor sublimity, neither melody nor majesty, in the shouting, and piping, and whistling, and hissing, and barking of closely intermixed human voices and laughter.*'"

—Where am I?—where am I?—what am I about? Is some mocking echo repeating my former words? But, hush once more, for the voice is speaking again:—

"This is but the faintest outline of what will be laid before you hereafter, if, indeed, we ever meet again as now. These points meanwhile are established as facts which admit of no dispute:—man's degradation from his original brotherhood with ourselves; his yearnings for re-association; his constant efforts in that direction. And for my own part, I am equally satisfied of the probability of his success in those efforts. I venture confidently to anticipate futurity, and I see him mounted in his brick-roosting homes, growing wings and feathers, because they have become a necessity; while, as the long ages pass over, and his present vile habits die out from want of use, he will gradually lay aside the unmeaning jargon which he has fallen into since he ceased to be one of us, and return to the original caw of his happier state.

"Alas! my friends, that for us, personally, these bright

visions cannot be realized! *We* shall none of us behold that glorious day! I speak it with regret. As long as *we* can hope to last, men will probably remain the thin-skinned, clothes-wearing creatures our grandsires remember them; still hop-lop-sided on the ground, and only occasionally, and by very clumsy machines, soar into the sky. But I find no difficulty in looking forward through innumerable successions of ages to a time when men will again, through gradual successive developments of down and feathers, become swift-flying birds of the air; our friends, companions, brothers—rooks, in fact, like ourselves. All observations tend to show that a change in this direction is already at work, nay, has been so for a considerable length of time, and with increasing symptoms of success, as the observations of Mr. Raven-wing, Mr. Yellow-beak, and Mr. Grey-legs, must have convinced you. All probability therefore is in favour of that success becoming one day complete.

“But, in the meantime, knowing the peculiar relations between their race and ours, and anticipating the day when they shall become one, should it not be our endeavour to . . .” . . .

—What silence is this, which has cut short the sentence, and which neither their caws nor the voice of the speaker break again? How is this?—where am I?—Do I wake or dream?

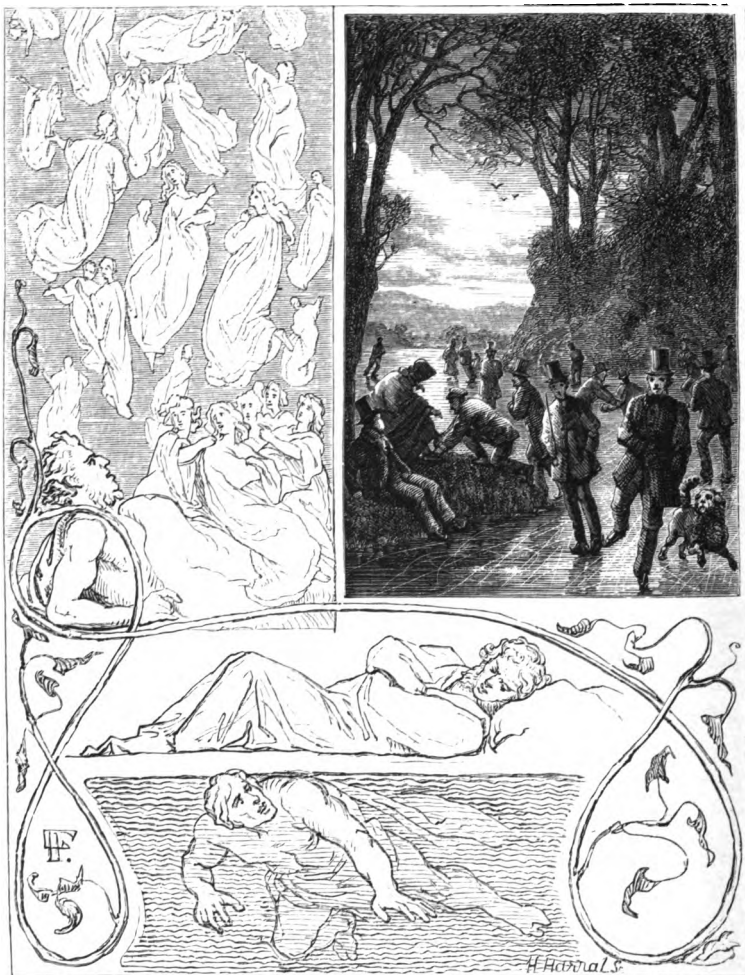
I peep through the hedge once more, but see nothing but a bare, deserted field. They are all gone. The green pasture lies void and empty under the setting sun. A deathlike silence is around, or so it seems to me. Only the constant honey-suckle wearies not of breathing out its sweetness round my head. Companion, where are you? Alas! no hand is clasped in mine. Alone, then, have I been dreaming some foolish dream, or is some one in secret sympathizing with me still?

—Ah! memory re-awakens by degrees. I recall the book that was lying upon my desk when I issued forth into these

fields; and the thought of the first temptation of man flashes from another book upon my soul.

Woe upon us! The world grows old, and life is repeated from age to age, and the same sins are sinned. Still we desire to be as God in knowledge; still the hand writes in fire upon our walls, "Except ye become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven."





THE GENERAL THAW.



THE GENERAL THAW.

“ Ah ! when shall all men’s good
Be each man’s rule, and universal Peace
Lie like a shaft of light across the land.”

TENNYSON.



CE, Snow, and Water,—only think of such near neighbours—blood relations, so to speak, from the creation—squabbling about their rights and dignities, and which was best of the three; instead of living pleasantly together, giving and taking in turn, as the case might be.

But so it was, and the facts were these. It was a very, very hard winter that year, and the Ice on the mill-dam grew so thick and strong, and was, besides, so remarkably smooth and fine, that it forgot its origin, and fancied itself a crystal floor.

Only think what nonsense ! But there is no nonsense people will not be ready to believe, when they once begin to meditate upon their own perfections.

And so, fancying himself a crystal floor, the Ice got to look down upon the Water which flowed underneath him, as an impertinent intruder; and considered it a piece of great familiarity, on the part of the Snow, to come dropping upon him from the sky.

In fact, his head was so full of his own importance in the world, that it seemed to him, everybody else ought to be full of

it too, and keep at a respectful distance, and admire him. And he made some very unpleasant remarks to this effect.

For instance: "I should be much obliged to you," observed he one day to the Water which ran into the dam from the stream, "if you would have the goodness to turn yourself in some other direction, when you find yourself coming near me. Over the fields to the right hand, or to the left; or into the ditches, if you please; anywhere, in fact, but just under me. You fidget me to death with your everlasting trickling and movement. Pray amuse yourself in some other way, than by disturbing people in such a position as mine. I dare say you have no notion of how disagreeable you make yourself to others: you are so used to your own ways, yourself. But the truth is, I can bear it no longer, and you must carry your restlessness somewhere else—it distracts my attention from my friends!"

Now the "friends" he spoke of were the skaters and sliders, who did nothing but praise his beauty as they darted along on his surface, making beautiful figures as they went.

"But *I* wish," answered the Water, as it kept running in, "that you would not talk nonsense, but leave me a little more elbow-room, instead of pressing so close upon me that I get thinner and thinner every day. If you don't, I shall certainly break out if I can, and be at the top myself. I've no notion of being kept down by my neighbours, however grand and polished they may be. Just take care of yourself, and look out. If the springs on the moors should get loose, and the streams fill and come in here with a rush, I should lift you up like nothing, and silly enough you would look. Turn in another direction, indeed!—into the ditches if I please—many thanks for the pleasant suggestion—and all to accommodate you! Why, I should as soon think of sinking into the ground, and I hope I know my own level better than that! Meantime, I give you notice. If you won't be obliging yourself, you must expect no favour from me, and it will be good-

bye to your beauty and grandeur if I can only squeeze through!"

"*If!*" shouted the Ice, in a mocking tone.

"If? well, if!" echoed the Water in a rage. "Stiff and strong as you are, it only wants a thaw in the hills to send a torrent your way, and the whole thing's done. But what do you know about thaws, and hills, and torrents, and the force of pent-up water, fixed in one place as you are, and never getting any information?

"Now if you were to ask my advice who know so much more than you do and could give you a hint or two upon yielding gracefully to necessity it would be greatly to your advantage But"

But the *but* died away, and was lost; for, even while the Water was talking, some of it was freezing; and as it froze, its voice got thinner and thinner, till at last it could not be heard at all.

Meantime, the Ice got thicker and thicker, and more conceited every minute. And said he, "It cannot be worth my while to trouble myself with what is happening underneath me! There the Water is, and there he must remain, let him brag and chatter as he will; he at the bottom, and I at the top. As to making out what he means by his long talk, that's hopeless. He stuck fast in the middle of the story himself. I wish he would get out of the way; but as he won't,—well,—there he must stay, I suppose—he at the bottom, and I at the top. He's all in a muddle with his *ifs* and his threats. But one cannot expect firmness of mind from anything so restless as he is. It needs some solidity of character to maintain one's position in life. Rolling stones gather no moss. *I* sit firm. And here come my friends to do me honour, I declare!"

And come they did; and in such quantities, that the mill-dam Ice had never felt half so grand before.

It was really the prettiest sight in the world! Here, were beautiful ladies in chairs, pushed along from behind by gay

young men. There, other young men were skating or sliding; sometimes shooting by like stars, sometimes stooping to hit balls, which flew half across the large expanse of ice by the effort of one blow; sometimes cutting figures, which the eye could scarcely follow, so rapid and brilliant were the movements. While, in a separate corner, children were sliding and shouting, tumbling down, laughing, and getting up again, as happy as any of the others.

Really the Ice, on whom this pretty scene took place, must be excused for feeling a little vain. It seemed to him as if it was all done in compliment to himself; for, you see, he had never been at school to learn any better, and find out how insignificant everybody is to his neighbour.—“That I should be treated with such honour and distinction! that I should be the supporter of such a brilliant assembly! that I should be necessary to the happiness of such crowds!” Such were the Ice’s reflections from time to time, as his friends continued their sports. Talk he could not, for he was lost in a rapture of delight; and he felt that, as life could have nothing more to give, he wished it might last on in this way for ever. Poor Ice! He thought only of himself! As to the trickling of the Water underneath him, it fidgeted him no longer. “What can I or my friends care for such trifles?” was his consolatory reflection.

So it trickled away unattended to, and presently the day closed in, and the company went away home. And then, as night drew on, the wind veered to the south, and a drizzle of snow began to fall. It was very light at first—mere snow-dust, in fact, and in the darkness the Ice knew nothing of what was happening, for feel it he could not. But by degrees the drizzle turned into flakes, which dropped with graceful delay through the air, and said to themselves as they did so, “How we *shall* be admired by the world when it awakes! It isn’t every day in the year it’s so beautifully drest. It’s only now and then it has visitors from the skies. Do let us cover it well over, so that it may find itself white altogether for once!”

Which they did; and when the morning came, not a bit of the mill-dam Ice was to be seen. Indeed, he might have gone on all day, fancying it was night (for everything was dark to him, as he lay underneath in the shade of the snow-fall), but that one or two luckless urchins, who wanted to slide, came and kicked some of it away with their feet.

And then he found out the truth. There he was, covered up with a great white sheet, and couldn't see out! His beauty, his friends, his glories, where were they now? He thought of yesterday, and his heart almost broke! Oh! who had dared to send these miserable Snow-flakes to disfigure him thus? Never was insolence like this! The trickling of the water below was a trifle, a mere nothing by comparison!

The Snow-flakes were amazed. "We come of ourselves, nobody sent us," murmured they, as they still kept falling gently from the sky, and dropping like eider-down on the ice; "and we have the right to come where we please. Who can hinder us, I wonder? The clouds are too heavy to carry us all, so some of us come down. My sisters and I were nearest, so here we are. We don't understand your rudeness. You ought to be flattered that we choose to come,—we, who are used to be carried about by the breezes, and live in the clouds! But such a reception as this, why, it hurts the feelings, of course!"

"*The feelings!*" shouted the Ice, half ready to crack with vexation; "you to talk of feelings, who have flung yourselves uninvited on my face; beggarly wanderers as you are, without house or home; and have spoilt my beauty and happiness at once! . . ."

He couldn't go on; the words stuck fast as he tried.

"Beggarly wanderers!" echoed the Snow-flakes, almost losing their temper as they repeated the words: "now see what comes of being low-born, and envious, and vile. See what it is to live in the dirty hole of an earthy world! You don't know the good when it comes to you, you dreary motionless lump of ignorant matter! Beggarly wanderers, indeed! This to us,

who are carried about by the breezes, and live in the clouds of the sky! Dear us! Who would lower themselves to your level by choice? And beauty,—you talk of beauty, as if we could find any here but what we bring ourselves. Fancy the beauty of dingy, dirty stuff like this earth of yours! But, of course, you know no better; and what is worse, you won't learn when you might. Oh dear, what it is to be low born, and envious, and vile! Oh dear, what it is to belong to the winds and the skies, and to find one's self in an alien land!"

"If the winds and the skies are so fond of you, let them come and take you away," cried the Ice. "I ask only one thing—Begone! Begone with your mincing conceit and your beauty, you are not worthy that I should hold you up."

"You braggart! we should like to hide you and cover you over for ever," muttered the Snow-flakes. "And we don't intend to go for your pleasure and whim. Here we are, and here we shall stay, let you squall and bawl as you will. We at the top, and you at the bottom; and there you may remain!"

And such seemed likely to be the case; but by and bye, when all the clouds had passed over, and no more snow was falling, and the sun had begun to shine, a party of skaters and sliders came and stood on the bank of the dam.

And said they one to another,—first, "What a pity!" and then, "But the snow is not very thick;" and then, "It surely might be shovelled away if we had but two or three men with shovels and brooms." So they sent for two or three men with shovels and brooms, and these swept and shovelled, and shovelled and swept, till a great space of the ice was left clear, and the snow was laid in heaps on the sides.

It was a very hard case for the Snow! Such a poor, soft, delicate thing to be so ill-used,—it was really cruel work! Pushed, and flung, and dirtied, and shovelled about till she was ready to melt with self-pity.

But there is no helping one's fate, so she lay along the sides

of the mill-dam, grumbling and groaning—the only satisfaction she could get.

“So inhospitable to visitors any how,” cried she; “and so stupid to visitors like us! But this comes of leaving one’s station to mix with things below. And to soil my lovely colour with their hateful besoms and brooms! And to squeeze me, and throw me about with their odious shovels, as if I was dirt! Ah! we who belong to the sky should never come near the earth, that’s very clear. People here don’t know what it is to be delicate and refined. Oh mercy! what comes next? . . .”

She might well exclaim. The party of sliding boys had quarrelled,—a sort of fun-quarrel among themselves. So there was just now a rush to the side of the dam, a seizing, and pommelling, and squeezing of snow into lumps by a dozen active little hands; and then the balls were let fly in every direction; and some hit necks, and others faces, and others jackets, and others caps: and all got messed and broken, and thrown about. There is no knowing when the fight would have ended, if the skaters had not interfered.

The scattered, begrimed morsels could not utter a single word. But the Ice talked fast enough. “Now you have got your deserts,” cried he gaily. “Now you see what it is to come and boast over your betters. Oh, you’re too delicate and refined for earth, are you? Well, then, keep in the sky. Nobody wants you here—I told you that before. See, now, you have to sit in a corner, and watch how the world admires me! You wanted to hide me for ever, did you, you poor soft, foolish thing? But my friends knew better than that, and now you’ve got your deserts. I shall have you all in order one of these days. You and the water below, with his fidgety spite. What a droll idea it is! Why you *both* want to be at the top, if—poor dears!—you only could. And you can’t see—poor blind things!—that *I’m* the only one fit to stand alone!”

“We will soon see to that,” growled the Water from below,

and surely rather louder than usual. "I feel what I feel, and you'll feel it presently, too. If I can't stand alone, I can bide my time. We *both* want to be at top, do you say? And who are *both*, if you please? Are you classing me, with my strength, and that flimsy snow, together? What a judge you must be!"

"As if strength was the only merit!" murmured what still remained of flaky Snow on the ice. "What a coarse, earthy notion! But it's just what one might expect; they're all alike down here, Water and Ice and all; no fit companions for us: but we've found that out too late. We lowered ourselves to come down,—the more's the pity, I'm sure!"

Were there ever three creatures so silly as the Water, the Snow, and the Ice? I dare not answer, No.

Well, before the day was over, the skaters had asked each other, as they passed and repassed, "Was there not a softness on the ice?"—"Was not the snow less crisp?" But all was perfectly safe, so people did not stop to talk then: only, as they went home, they agreed that a thaw was coming.

Which remark, the Ice, not hearing, knew nothing about. So he never suspected why the water underneath was more fussy than ever, but thought it was all out of spite to himself; so he raved and scolded away; boasting that his friends should one day help him to get rid of it, as they had done just now of the Snow. "It's a great thing to have powerful friends!" cried he, triumphantly.

But the Water gurgled and giggled, and made no answer.

The truth was, that one or two springs in the hills had got loose from a few hours' thaw; and a strong stream, though not a torrent, was pouring into the dam. And presently there was a cry for room.

"More room! more room! make much more room! You stiff-necked Ice, do you hear?"

And now the contest began.—"I shall not give way an inch, you noisy vagabond Water!"

—"If you don't, I shall wash you away."

—"You shall wash the world away first. I shall maintain my position."

—"We shall see about that in a minute."

And so they went on, while the Snow-heaps whimpered at the sides, "What a coarse-minded couple they are! What it is to be low-born and vile! *We* are quite unfit to be here!"

Meantime, the Water poured in, and kept swelling more and more; till at last there was a heaving upward—in spite of all he could do—of the crystal floor; and by and bye a sharp crack rang along its surface, from one end to the other.

He could not maintain his position after all!

And now came another, and another, and these were along the sides, as the lift-up came; and at one corner in oozed the Water itself. It had no chance of bragging, however; for as fast as it touched the surface it froze, and was turned to Ice.

So this was all the Water could do then, for the thaw in the hills had stopped. But the Ice never rallied again, because of those horrible cracks. He was laughed at on every side—he, who had boasted so much! For the Water below and the Snow above, who were ready enough to tease each other at other times, were willing to join together now in spiting a common foe. Such is the way of the world!

And when a real general thaw came in the air, and all over the country, as it soon did, and the sliders and skaters withdrew—oh, dear, those were dismal days for the poor deserted Ice!—"My friends forsake me," cried he, "and my foes rejoice! Those cracks have broken my heart! I believe it is melting away."

And it was; but the Snow-flakes were the first to disappear, and then the Ice became wet outside. And said he, "The Water has squeezed through, I declare! This comes of keeping bad company; but, anyhow, the Snow-flakes are gone, and that's civil at least. *They* did what they were asked, and that's something."

Now the Water had not squeezed through, and the Snow-flakes had not been civil; but the cleverest people make mistakes sometimes.

And presently the Water below found the pressure upon him not quite so great. There was a little more room to move in. So said he, "Dear me! this is good. My friend the Ice is giving way. 'Better late than never,' we'll say. He's coming to reason at last."

But the Ice was not coming to reason—he was only melting away. And as he got thinner and thinner, he struggled less and less with the Water; and said he, "We shall all live to be friends and neighbours at last, I believe."

But they lived to be far more than that, for one day they found themselves brothers! For when the ice got so thin that the water poured over the sides, it broke into a thousand fragments, and went rolling and tumbling about, dissolving away every minute. And the snow-heaps which had stuck on the sides fell in two, and they all rolled about together, Ice and Snow and Water in one. And they wept, and rolled, and tumbled, and tumbled, and rolled, and wept; and, cried they, "What have we been doing? What folly have we been talking? Scolding, and thwarting, and boasting, when, my friends—my dear, dear friends—we are all of us brothers together!"

It was a long and happy embrace: it is going on still! But, oh! what a pity they did not find the truth out sooner! Let those who are brothers by nature think of this, and not wait for *The General Thaw*—Death.





THE LIGHT OF LIFE.



THE LIGHT OF LIFE.

“Except the Lord build the house, their labour is but lost that build it.”

PSALM cxxvii. 1.



WHAT more could have been done for it than I have done!” The cry came from an afflicted heart.

It was uttered by Hans Jansen, the Hamburg printer's only son, as he sat moaning over a dying rose-tree in the corner of a little backyard behind his father's house.

Hans Jansen was what is commonly called *not all there*; that is, he could not see and comprehend the things of this life as his neighbours did. More than half of what passed around him was hidden from his eyes. He was in part, though not altogether, an idiot.

It was a great distress to his parents that this should be the case—it had been so once, however. But, being good Christians, they had reconciled themselves to it, and learned by degrees, to see comfort through the cloud. If Hans was below the rest of the world in some ways, he was above them in others. The fear of God and the love of his neighbour had come to him almost as an instinct; at any rate without the struggles some people have to go through, before their hearts are touched by either one or the other. He wouldn't have

missed saying his prayers night and morning, or grace at meals, to please an emperor ; and an unkind word about any one could never be got out of him. Truly their Hans was ripening for a better state of existence, whether he had any book learning or not. He had nothing to fear, but everything to hope for, from death.

And he had one passion—one special cause of enjoyment and delight. He doated on flowers, and was seldom seen without one in his button-hole all the summer through. But this was because his good-nature had made him many friends, who took a pleasure in seeing him pleased, and gave him a nosegay when they could. It was very well known that he had no garden of his own.

Mr. Jansen's house was a red brick one, in a row, with a square enclosure in front, covered with pebbles, and a square yard at the back, which had a pump in the middle, and a dog-kennel on one side. It is true this yard was covered with soil, and there were scrubby patches of grass upon it here and there ; but it was used for a drying-ground, and had never once been brightened by flowers since the day it was first parcelled out and the walls were built round it, across which were now stretched the lines on which the linen was hung to dry.

The fact was, Mr. Jansen had not wished for a garden. He was busy from morning to night at his printing business in the town ; his wife had quite enough on her hands in household cares ; and no effectual work could be expected from an idiot child.

How Hans came to be so fond of flowers was a mystery ; but there are many mysteries of this sort in the world. It had been so from his baby-days, and many were the hours he had spent, unnoticed, in a corner of that back-yard, grubbing in the old black soil, "making believe" to have a garden with beds and walks like those he had seen elsewhere. Nay, once or twice he had tried to grow mustard and cress, and even sweet-peas, a few seeds of which were given him by a neighbour's

child; but, somehow or other, nothing ever came of these real attempts, and he had to make himself happy with the make-believe garden at the end.

But it was no make-believe plant he was wailing over now, but a real *Géant de Batailles* rose-tree, which had been given him many weeks before. It was thus:—A good-natured nursery gardener, who knew his father, had let him walk through his grounds one flower-show day, before the company came; and having, by chance, noticed poor Hans sobbing from excitement at sight of the glories round him, his own heart melted; for he had an only and very clever son himself, and he felt sorry for the darkness over his friend's child. So when Hans was going away, he gave him, not only a nosegay of the tulips and hyacinths, but a fine young rose-tree in a pot; "as fine a *Géant de Batailles* as had ever been raised," said he to Hans, as he offered it; adding that it would flower in six or eight weeks, and brighten all the place up by its rich blaze of colour.

Hans trembled as he received it, and he stood with his mouth half open, irresolute and abashed, wanting to speak, yet not daring.

"What is it, boy?" asked the nursery gardener. "Speak out."

"How do you make your flowers so beautiful?" gasped Hans, half afraid of what he had said.

"Well, well," returned the nursery gardener, with a smile, "some in one way and some in another; but we don't tell our secrets to everybody. Nevertheless, I'll tell you how to make your rose beautiful, for you'll make no bad use of anything, I'll be bound. You've a yard or a court, or some place with soil in it, eh?"

"Yes, yes," cried Hans.

"Then I'll tell you what you must do," pursued the nursery gardener. "Dig a hole in a sheltered place, pretty deep, you know, and put in a bone or two, and some hair (my son shall

give you a handful) at the bottom. Then turn the plant out of the pot, not disturbing the ball of earth for the world, remember; and set it right down upon the hair. Then fill up the hole neatly with soil, and say nothing about what you've done to anybody, and there's an end. Keep it sheltered, mind, and water it at first, or if you see it get very dry; and with soap-suds whenever you can get them. Soap-suds and bones and hair are the main things. There's nothing like them for bringing roses to perfection. You'll have flowers as big as a hat, and as bright as cherries, before the summer's over, if you do as I say, and look well after the plant. There! good luck to you and it! Good-bye."

And this was the plant—this, poor wizened thing—over which Hans was moaning. But how had it come to this? That was the difficulty. The gardener's son had given Hans the hair, and he had found the bones,—there were plenty by the dog-kennel; and he had dug the hole and put them at the bottom; and he had turned the plant out of the pot, and not broken the ball of earth; and he had placed it upon the hair, and filled up the hole; and watered it at first, and whenever he saw it get very dry, and with soap-suds on a wash-day; for he had only to ask and have, without question or trouble. He had done everything, in short—surely everything! For he had put it in the most sheltered spot he could find—in the self-same corner where he had played at make-believe gardens as a child; and it had seemed as if an old dream were suddenly come true. And as to looking well after it,—could a miser have watched his gold with more jealous care? And no one had interfered; for he had told nobody, partly from some indefinite idea that the nursery gardener had ordered him not; partly because he thought it would be so nice to surprise his mother, some day before the summer was over, by the rich blaze of colour that was to brighten all the place.

The very maid who hung out the clothes in the yard didn't know of it; for to keep the secret, and make the shelter of the

tree more complete, he had set up boards across the corner where it was planted, from wall to wall, and no one could see what was there. They looked upon the boards as some idle freak of the idiot mind.

It was the buds that failed first; those buds which ought to have swollen and grown larger day by day. Even his eye, sharpened now by anxious care, could detect that they rather dwindled than increased in size; and, observing this more and more as time went on, he one day summoned courage to walk to the Nursery Gardens, and tell his fears to the giver of the plant.

But he, when he found that all he had ordered had been done, only smiled.

"I tell you again," said he, "and from long experience, there's nothing like bones and hair for bringing roses to perfection. You can't go wrong with them. Give it a little more water or soap-suds. You've perhaps a light soil in your place. Give it more water. The buds will swell fast enough, I'll be bound. Indeed, I fancy your watching it so closely you can't see true. It's easy enough to do that, I can tell you. The buds are grown, I suspect, though you don't think so. Leave it to itself. Don't fancy anything wrong. It's sure to be right with bones and hair and soap-suds. They're the finest rose-manure in the world."

Hans listened with his mouth open, nodded his head, with a "Thank you!" at the end, and went away, hoping he had not "seen true." And he did not take the boards down nearly so often afterwards, lest his watching too closely should do harm. But every time he did take them down, he grew more and more unhappy. The healthy green of the leaves was no longer to be seen; as for the buds, they shrivelled gradually more and more. Growth anywhere there was none. Inch by inch the plant was dying—or Hans thought so, and he rubbed his eyes for further light in vain. And one day, when the last leaves

which remained, had crinkled up and turned brown, he sat down on the ground, and wailed, as I have said:—

“What more could I have done for it than I have done?”

The dream of a dream come true at last, was over. The make-believe garden was still the only one he had ever enjoyed. He must go back to it again.

He replaced the boards, for he shrank from the very sight of the dying plant, and sat down on the ground again, though he scarcely knew why.

But presently there was a barking of the dog, and an opening of the door, and a shouting of “Hans!” by his mother. The nursery gardener was passing that way, and had called to admire the roses he expected to see. Hans could not speak, but led the way to the corner of the yard, and, when they were there, he pointed to the boards before he took them down, and exclaimed, trying to smile through his tears:

“I couldn’t have sheltered it more, could I? It’s never been scorched, or chilled, or blown upon, even. It’s had bones, and hair, and water, and all you ordered, and I’ve looked well after it, and yet it’s dead, I know!”

As he spoke, Hans lifted down the boards, and exposed the withered tree.

The nursery gardener stared at it, and then at Hans, in genuine amazement.

“You don’t mean to say you’ve kept it *so* all the time?” cried he. “Why, what have you been thinking about, man? How could you expect it to live? Why, it’s had no light!”

“You said nothing about that,” replied Hans, his face distorted with bewilderment and grief. “You said you made roses beautiful with bones, and hair, and soap-suds, and that I should make mine beautiful with them too.”

“But not without sunshine,” shouted the nursery gardener, quite excited at the idea of such a mistake.

Hans made no answer. He could not utter another word.

He sat down on the ground again and hid his face in his hands.

"I must have spoken like a fool," exclaimed the nursery gardener, half to himself. "But who'd have thought of anybody fancying a plant could get on without light? Well, perhaps I ought to have thought though," added he, as his eye fell on poor Hans' doubled-up figure. Then, laying his hand on the lad's shoulder, it came into his heart to try and explain matters.

"Look up, Hans," said he. "It's not your fault at all—it's mine. There was something I forgot to tell you. I spoke like a fool when I talked of making roses beautiful with manure and things like that, as if they could do it themselves. I didn't mean that. It is God who makes the roses, you know, and He makes them so that they can't do without the light He chooses them to live in, and that's the light from heaven—do you see?"

Here the nursery gardener paused to consider how he must go on, and Hans shuffled a bit and then looked up at his friend. And his friend saw the light from heaven streaming on that sad, half intelligent face, with the red eyes straining upwards for comprehension; and he proceeded.

"So they can't do without God's light, let you give them what manure you will. They're only helps, Hans, such things as those.

"A man may help or hinder what God intends, by good or bad management, it's true; but that's all, and that's all I meant. Bones, and hair, and soap-suds are the finest rose-manure in the world, that's true too, and it's a great secret; but they're all nothing—nothing, lad!—without God's secret—the light from heaven. Do you see what I mean, Hans?"

"I'm trying," said Hans.

"Hans," continued the nursery gardener, "It's been my fault, not yours; and you shall have another rose-tree, or we'll save this one yet, for if there's a bit of life left in it, God's light

may bring it round. But tell me, now. You are a very good lad, you know, at times—indeed, I fancy always; but no matter, we'll call it at times. What makes you ever good?"

Hans' catechism had been short, but sound; and he answered at once, "God's grace."

"Now that's just it!" shouted the nursery gardener, in delight. "That's just what I meant. And all the schooling, and teaching, and trying in the world won't do without God's grace, will they, Hans?"

Hans nodded his negative assent.

"No, they're only manures and helps," pursued the nursery gardener, "and very good things, no doubt, the same as bones, and hair, and soap-suds for roses, and there's nobody can dispute about *them*. But all the helps in the world can do nothing without the main thing God chooses them to thrive by, and that's God's grace for a man, and God's light for a plant; and what one is for one, that the other is for the other, and it's my opinion it's the light of Heaven for both."

If Hans did not quite follow the thread of the nursery gardener's argument he must be excused. The nursery gardener understood what he meant himself, and that was something; and Hans added to his small stock of observations the useful truth he had bought so dearly, viz., that plants cannot live without light.

Those who are interested further in his fate will be glad to hear that the nursery gardener soon after turned one side of the old printer's back-yard into a garden, at his own expense, and gave Hans such plants and help, that both mother and son had a few bright flowers of their own the next year, to delight their eyes.

But more than this. The poor lad proved so watchful and attentive; so obedient, too, to advice in his own small matters; and the rational occupation to an end seemed so evidently to clear a something from the confusion of his mind, that it struck the nursery gardener one day to trust him with some little

employment on his more important premises. And the experiment was not unsuccessful. On the one subject of flowers Hans became not only trustworthy but intelligent.

And so it came to pass, that it was in the nursery garden, among the flowers—his only idea of an earthly paradise—that the poor idiot ended his days. There, guileless as the beautiful creatures which surrounded him, and trustful as the Highest Wisdom could have made him, he lived; and thence did the spirit, so long pent in an imperfect earthly tabernacle, return to the great Lord of life and light and intelligence, without whom “nothing is strong, nothing is holy.”







F

GIFTS.



GIFTS.

“Now there are diversities of gifts.”—1 COR. xii. 4.

ONE—two—three—four—five; five neatly-raked kitchen-garden beds, four of them side by side, with a pathway between; the fifth a narrow slip, heading the others, and close to the gravel walk, as it was for succession-crops of mustard and cress, which are often wanted in a hurry for breakfast or tea.

Most people have stood by such beds in their own kitchen-gardens on soft spring mornings and evenings, and looked for the coming up of the seeds which either they or the gardener had sown.

Radishes in one, for instance, and of all three sorts—white-turnip, red-turnip, and long-tailed.

Carrots in another; and this bed had been dug very deep indeed—subsoil digging, as it were; two spades' depth, that the roots might strike freely down.

Onions in another. Beets in the fourth; both the golden and red varieties: while the narrow slip was half mustard and half cress.

Such was the plan here, however; and here, for a time, all the seeds lay sleeping, as it seemed. For, as the long smooth-

raked beds stretched out dark and bare under the stars, they betrayed no symptoms of anything going on within.

Nevertheless, there was no sleeping in the case. The little seed-grains were fulfilling the law of their being, each after its kind; the grains, all but their inner germs, decaying; the germs swelling and growing, till they rose out of their cradles, and made their way, through their earthen coverlid, to the light of day.

They did not all come up quite together, of course, nor all quite alike. But as to the time, the gardener had made his arrangements so cleverly, that none was very far behind his neighbour. And as to the difference of shape in the first young leaves, what could it signify? It is true the young mustards were round and thick; the cresses oval and pointed; the carrots mere green threads; the onions sharp little blades; while the beets had an odd, staid look. But they all woke up to the same life and enjoyment, and were all greeted with friendly welcome as they appeared, by the dew, and light, and sunshine, and breezes, so necessary to them all, children of one mother, dependent on the same influences to bring them to perfection.

What *could* put comparisons, and envyings, and heart-burnings into their heads, so filling them either with conceit or melancholy misgivings? As if there was but one way of being right or doing right; as if every creature was *not* good after its kind, but must needs be good after somebody else's kind, or not be good at all!

It must have been some strolling half-informed grub, one would think, who had not yet come to his full senses, who started such foolish ideas.

It began with an inquiry at first, for no actual unkindness was meant.

"I find I get deeper and deeper into the soil every day," remarked the Carrot. "I shall be I don't know how long, at last. I have been going down regularly, quite straight, for weeks. Then I am tapering off to a long point at the end,

in the most beautiful proportions possible. A traveller told me, the other day, this was perfection, and I believe he was right."

(That mischievous vagabond grub, you see!)

"I knew what it was to live near the surface in my young days," the Carrot went on; "but never felt solid enjoyment till I struck deeply down, where all is so rich and warm. This is really being firmly established and satisfactory to one's-self, though still progressing, I hope, for I don't see why there should be a limit. Pray tell me, neighbours," added he, good-naturedly enough, "how it fares with all the rest of you. I should like to know that your roots are as long, and slim, and orange-coloured as mine; doing as well, in fact, and sinking as far down. I wish us to be all perfect alike. Perfection is the great thing to try for."

"When you are sure you are trying in the right way," sneered a voice from the neighbouring radish-bed (the red and white turnip variety were always satirical). "But if the long, slim, orange-roots, striking deep into the earth, are your idea of perfection, I advise you to begin life over again. Dear me! I wish you had consulted us before. Why, we stopped going down long ago, and have been spreading out sideways and all ways, into stout, round solid balls ever since, close white flesh throughout, inside; and not orange, but red without."

"White, he means," shouted another.

"Red, I call it," repeated the first. "But no matter; certainly not orange!"

And "Certainly not orange!" cried they all.

"So," continued the first speaker, "we are quite concerned to hear you ramble on about growing longer and longer, and strongly advise you to keep your own counsel, and not mention it to any one else. We are friends, you know, and can be trusted; but you really must leave off wasting your powers and energy in the dark inside of the ground, out of everybody's sight and knowledge. Come to the surface, and make the

most of it, as we do, and then you'll be a credit to your friends. Never mind what travellers say. They've nothing else to do but to walk about and talk, and they tell us we are perfection too. Don't trust to them, but to what we tell you now, and alter your course at once. Roll yourself up into a firm round ball as fast as you can. You won't find it hard if you once begin. You have only to—"

"Let me put in a word first," interrupted one of the long-tailed Radishes in the same bed; "for it is of no use to go out of one extreme into another, which you are on the high road to do if you are disposed to take Mr. Roundhead's advice; who, by the way, ought to be ashamed of forcing his very peculiar views upon his neighbours. Just look at us. We always strike moderately down, so we know it's the right thing to do, and that solid round balls are the most unnatural and useless things in the world. But, on the other hand, my dear friend, we have learnt where to stop, and a great secret it is, but one I fear you know nothing about at present; so the sooner you make yourself acquainted with it the better. There's a limit to everything but folly—even to striking deep into the soil. And as to the soil being better so very far down, nobody can believe it; for why should it be? The great art is to make the most of what is at hand, as we do. Time enough to go into the depths when you have used up what is so much easier got at. The man who gathered some of us yesterday, called out, 'These are just right.' So I leave you to judge whether some other people we know of must not be wrong."

"You rather overwhelm me, I own," mused the Carrot; "though it's remarkable you counsellors should not agree among yourselves. Is it possible, however, that I have been making a great mistake all my life? What lost time to look back upon! Yet a ball;—no, no, not a ball! I don't think I could grow into a solid round ball were I to try for ever!"

"Not having tried, how can you tell?" whispered the Turnip-Radish persuasively. "But you never will, if you

listen to our old-fashioned friend next door, who has been halting between two opinions all his life:—will neither make an honest fat lump of it, as I do, nor plunge down and taper with you. But nothing can be done without an effort: certainly no change.”

“That is true,” murmured the Carrot, rather sadly; “but I am too old for further efforts myself. Mistake or no mistake, my fate is fixed. I am too far down to get up again, that’s certain; but some of the young ones may try. Do you hear, dears? Some of you stop short, if you can, and grow out sideways and all ways, into stout, round, solid balls.”

“Oh, nonsense about round balls!” cried the long-tailed Radish in disgust; “what will the world come to, if this folly goes on! Listen to me, youngsters, I beg. Go to a moderate depth, and be content; and if you want something to do, throw out a few fibres for amusement. You’re firm enough without them, I know, but the employment will pass away time.”

“There are strange delusions abroad just now,” remarked the Onions to each other; “do you hear all this talk about shape and way of growth? and everybody in the dark on the subject, though they seem to be quite unconscious of the fact themselves. That fellow chattered about solid balls, as if there was no such thing as bulbs, growing layer upon layer, and coat over coat, at all. Of course the very long orange gentleman, with his tapering root, is the most wrong of the whole party; but I doubt if Mr. Roundhead is much wiser when he speaks of close white flesh inside, and red (of all ridiculous nonsense) without. Where are their flaky skins, I should like to know? Who is ever to peel them, I wonder? Poor things! I can’t think how they got into such ways. How tough and obstinate they must be! I wish we lived nearer. We would teach them a little better than that, and show them what to do.”

“I have lived near you long enough,” grumbled a deep-red Beet in the next bed; “and you have never taught me;

neither shall you, if I can help it. A pretty instructor you would be, who think it ridiculous to be red! I suppose you can't grow red yourself, and so abuse the colour out of spite. Now I flatter myself I am red inside as well as out, so I suppose I am more ridiculous than your friend who contrives to keep himself white within, according to his own account; but I doubt the fact. There, there! it is a folly to be angry; so I say no more, except this: get red as fast as you can. You live in the same soil that I do, and ought to be able."

"Oh, don't call it red!" exclaimed a golden Beet, who was of a gentle turn of mind; "it is but a pale tint after all, and surely rather amber than red; and perhaps that was what the long-tailed orange gentleman meant."

"Perhaps it was; for perhaps he calls red orange, as you call it amber," answered the redder Beet; "anyhow he has rather more sense than our neighbour here, with his layer upon layer, and coat over coat, and flaky skin over all. Think of wasting time in such fiddle-faddle proceedings! Grow a good honest fleshy substance, and have done with it, and let people see you know what life is capable of. I always look at results. It is something to get such a body as I do out of the surrounding soil. That is living to some purpose, I consider. Nobody makes more of their opportunities than I do, I flatter myself, or has more to show for their pains; and a great future must be in store."

"Do you hear them? oh! do you hear them?" whispered the Cress to her neighbour the Mustard (there had been several crops, and this was one of the last); "do you hear how they all talk together of their growth, and their roots, and their bulbs, and size, and colour, and shape? It makes me quite unhappy, for I am doing nothing like that myself—nothing, nothing, though I live in the same soil! What is to be done? What do *you* do? Do you grow great white solid balls, or long, orange tapering roots, or thick red flesh, or bulbs with layer upon layer, and coat over coat? Some of them talked of

just throwing out a few fibres as a mere amusement to pass away time; and this is all I ever do for business. There will never be a great future in store for me. Do speak to me, but whisper what you say, for I shame to be heard or thought of."

"I grow only fibres too," groaned the Mustard in reply; "but I would spread every way and all ways if I could—downwards and upwards, and sideways and all ways, like the rest. I wish I had never been sown. Better never be sown and grown, than sown and grown to such trifling purpose! We are wretched indeed. But there must be injustice somewhere. The soil must give them what it refuses to us."

"Or we are weak and helpless, and cannot take in what it offers," suggested the Cress. "Alas! that we should have been sown only to be useless and unhappy!"

And they wept the evening through. But they alone were not unhappy. The Carrot had become uneasy, and could follow his natural tastes no longer in comfort, for thinking that he ought to be a solid round ball, white inside, and red without. The Onion had sore misgivings that the Beet might be right after all, and a good honest mass of red flesh be more worth labouring for, than the pale coat-within-coat growth in which he had indulged. It did seem a waste of trouble, a fiddle-faddle plan of life, he feared. Perhaps he had not gone down far enough in the soil. Some one talked of growing fibres for amusement—he had certainly not come to that; they were necessary to his support; he couldn't hold fast without them. Other people were more independent than he was, then; perhaps wiser,—alas!

And yet the Beet himself was not quite easy; for talk as he would, what he had called fiddle-faddle seemed ingenious when he thought it over, and he would like to have persuaded himself that he grew layer upon layer too. But it wouldn't do.

Perhaps, in fact, the bold little Turnip-Radishes alone, from their solid, substantial growth, were the only ones free from

misgivings, and believed that everybody ought to do as they did themselves.

What a disturbance there was, to be sure! And it got worse and worse, and they called on the winds and fleeting clouds, the sun, and moon, and stars above their heads, to stay their course awhile, and declare who was right and who was wrong; who was using, who abusing his gifts and powers; who was making most, who least, of the life and opportunities they all enjoyed; whose system was the one the rest must all strive to follow—the one only right.

But they called and asked in vain; till one evening, the clouds which had been gathering over the garden for days began to come down in rain, and sank swiftly into the ground, where it had been needed for long. Whereupon there was a general cry, "Here comes a messenger; now we shall hear!" as if they thought no one could have any business in the world but to settle their disputes.

So out came the old inquiries again:—who was right—who was wrong—who had got hold of the true secret? But the Cress made no inquiry at all, only shook with fright under the rain; for, thought she, the hour of my shame and degradation is come; poor useless creature that I am, I shall never more hold up my head!

As to the Carrot, into whose well-dug bed the rain found easiest entrance, and sank deepest, he held forth in most eloquent style upon the whole affair;—how it was started, and what he had said; how much he had once hoped; how much he now feared.

Now, the Rain-drops did not care to answer in a hurry; but as they came dropping gently down, they murmured, "Peace, peace, peace!" all over the beds. And truly they seemed to bring peace with them as they fell, so that a calm sank all around, and then the murmur proceeded:—"Poor little atoms in a boundless kingdom—each one of you bearing a part towards its fulness of perfection, each one of you endowed with

gifts and powers especially your own, each one of you good after its kind—how came these cruel misgivings and heart-burnings among you? Are the tops of the mountains wrong because they cannot grow corn like the valleys? Are the valleys wrong because they cannot soar into the skies? Does the brook flow in vain because it cannot spread out like the sea? Is the sea only right because its waters only are salt? Each good after its kind, each bearing a part in the full perfection of the kingdom which is boundless, the plan which is harmony—peace, peace, peace upon all!”

And peace seemed to fall more soothingly than ever upon the ground as the shower continued to descend.

“How much more, then,” resumed the murmur, “among you, to whose inner natures gifts and powers are given, each different from each; each good in its kind; each, if rightly carried out, doing service in that kingdom, which needs for its full perfection, that there shall be mountains to rise into the skies, valleys to lie low at their feet; some natures to go deep into the soil, others to rejoice on its surface; some to lie lightly upon the earth, as if scarcely claiming a home, others to grasp at it by wide-spread roots, and stretch out branches to the rivers; all good in their kind, all bearing a part in the glory of that universe whose children are countless as their natures are various—none useless, none in vain.

“Upon one, then, upon all—each wanted, each useful, each good after its kind—peace, peace, peace, peace, peace!” . . .

The murmur subsided to a whisper, the whisper into silence; and by the time the moon-shadows lay upon the garden there was peace everywhere.

Nor was it broken again; for henceforth even the Cress held up her head—she, also, good after her kind.

Only once or twice, that year, when the Carrots were gathered, there came up the strangest growths—thick, distorted lumps, that had never struck properly down.

The gardener wondered, and was vexed, for he prided him-

self on the digging of the carrot-bed. "Anything that had had any sense might have gone down into it, he was sure," he said. And he was not far wrong; but you see the Carrot had had no sense when he began to speculate, and tried to be something he was not intended to be.

Yet the poor clumsy thing was not quite useless after all. For, just as the gardener was about to fling it angrily away, he recollected that the cook might use it for soup, though it could not be served up at table—such a shape as it was! . . .

And this was exactly what she did.





NIGHT AND DAY.



NIGHT AND DAY.

"The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it; for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof."—REV. xxi. 23.

IN old times, long long ago, when Night and Day were young and foolish, and had not discovered how necessary they were to each other's happiness and well-being, they chased each other round the world in a state of angry disdain; each thinking that he alone was doing good, and that therefore the other, so totally unlike himself in all respects, must be doing harm, and ought to be got rid of altogether, if possible.

Old northern tales say that they rode, each of them in a car with a horse to it; but the horse of Night had a frosty mane, while that of Day had a shiny one. Moreover, foam fell from Frosty-mane's bit as he went along, which dropped on the earth as dew, and Shiny-mane's mane was so radiant that it scattered light through the air at every step. And thus they drove on, bringing darkness and light over the earth in turn—each pursuing and pursued; but knowing so little of this simple fact, that one of their chief causes of dispute was, which was going first. For of course if they had been able to settle that, it would have been known which was the more important of the two. But as they drove in a circle the point could not be decided, since what was first on one side was sure to be last on the other; as anybody may see who tries to draw their journey-

They never gave this a thought however, and there were no schoolmasters about just then to teach them. So round and round the world they went, without even knowing that it was round, still less that there is no such thing as first and last in a circle. And they never succeeded in overtaking, so as to pass each other, though they sometimes came up very close, and then there was twilight.

Of the two, one grumbled and the other scolded the most, and it is easy to guess which did which. Night was gloomy by nature, especially when clouds hid the moon and stars, so her complaints took a serious, melancholy tone. She was really broken-hearted at the exhaustion produced all over the world by the labours and pleasures which were carried on under the light of day, and used to receive the earth back as if it was a sick child and she a nurse, who had a right to be angry with what had been done to it. Day, on the contrary, was amazingly cheerful, particularly when the sun shone; never troubled his head about what was to happen when his fun was over: on the contrary, thought his fun ought to last for ever because it was pleasant, was quite vexed when it was put a stop to, and had no scruple in railing at his rival; whose only object, as it seemed to him, was to overshadow and put an end to all the happiness that was to be found.

"Cruel Night," he exclaimed, "what a life you lead me! How you thwart me at every turn! What trouble I have to take to keep your mischief in check. Look at the mists and shadows I must drive on one side, before I can make the world bright with my beautiful light! And no sooner have I done so than I feel your cold unwholesome breath trying to come up to me behind! But you shall never overtake me if I can help it: though I know that is what you want. You want to throw your hateful black shadow over my bright and pleasant world."

"*I* doing mischief which *you* have to keep in check!" groaned Night, quite confused by the accusation. "I, whose

whole time is spent in trying to repair the mischief other people do : *your* mischief, in fact, you wasteful consumer of life and power ! Every twelve hours I get back from you a half worn-out world, and this I am expected to restore and make as good as new again, but how is it possible ? Something I can do, I know. Some wear and tear I can renew and refresh, but some, alas ! I cannot ; and thus creep in destruction and death."

"Hear her," cried Day, in contempt, "taunting me with the damage I do, and the death and destruction I cause ! I the life-giver, at whose touch the whole world awakes which else might lie asleep for ever. She, the grim likeness of the death she talks about, and bringing death's twin sister in her bosom."

"You are Day the destroyer. I, Night the restorer," persisted Night, evading the argument.

"I am Day the life-giver, you Night the desolator," replied Day, bitterly.

"I am Night the restorer, you Day the destroyer," repeated Night.

"You are to me what death is to life," shouted Day.

"Then death is a restorer as I am," exclaimed Night.

And so they went on, like all other ignorant and obstinate arguers ; each full of his own one idea, and taking no heed of what the other might say. How could the truth be got at by such means ? Of course it could not, and of course, therefore, they persisted in their rudeness. And there were certain seasons particularly, when they became more impertinent to each other than ever. For instance, whenever it was summer, Day's horse, Shiny-mane, got so strong and frisky that Night had much ado to keep her place at all, so closely was she pressed in the chase. Indeed, sometimes there was so little of her to be seen, that people might have doubted whether she had passed by at all, had it not been for the dew Frosty-mane scattered, and which those saw who got up early enough in the morning.

Oh, the boasting of Day at these times ! And really he

believed what he said. He really thought it would be the greatest possible blessing if he were to go on for ever, and there were to be no Night. Perhaps he had the excuse of having heard a whisper of some old tradition to that effect: but the principal cause of the mistake was, that he thought too much about himself, and too little about his neighbour. "Fortunate world," cried he; "it must be clear to every one, now, who it is that brings blessings, and does good to you and your inhabitants. Good old earth, you become more and more lovely and fruitful, the more and more I shorten the hours of Night and lengthen my own. We can do tolerably well without her restoring power it would seem! If we could be rid of her altogether, therefore, what a Paradise there would be! Then the foliage, the flowers, the fruits, the precious crops of this my special season would last for ever. Would that it could remain uninterrupted!"

"He is praying for a curse. Were it granted no life could exist," murmured Night; and Frosty-mane's dew fell in tears as she spoke. No one heard her, however, but the dew was very acceptable, for the weather was very hot.

And she had her revenge; for when it was summer on one side the globe it was winter on the other; and then it was her turn to boast, as it was in winter that Frosty-mane came out in all his glory; every now and then running his car so nearly side by side with that of Day, that he squeezed him up into the smallest possible compass, besides putting out half his light. On which Night kept up a sort of murmuring triumph, "Good, good, very good: this is something like rest at last: now worn-out nature is recruiting herself to some purpose. Now weary muscles may gather strength instead of giving it out. Now strained eyes may recover brightness, and worn brains energy. Now all the secret forces of nature are at work, and exhaustion is being repaired on every side. Now trees and plants may keep their gases for themselves, and earth hold her own. Now waste and consumption cease, for the wear and tear

of life have stopped. Ah, if it could but cease for ever! Then the world would be renewed indeed, and giant races of man and beast and plant arise!"

"But never glow with the light of active life, or be seen but in the pale unmeaning moonlight," sneered the mortified Day, but he struggled in vain to make himself heard. The truth is, he was in the background just then, and nobody cared to listen. Yet he made his presence known from time to time at midday, by the light of Shiny-mane's hair. Nothing could quite put that out, even in winter when the weather was fine; and sometimes it shone over the ice and snow so brightly that they glittered like diamonds, or might almost have been taken for fireworks.

And so things went on till a check came, and it came in a very odd way. It is not always very easy to tell the exact causes of change even in one's own mind, much less in other people's, so I do not pretend to trace the whole process out in this case. But Night and Day did grow wiser as time went on, for, as every one knows, there is no squabbling or boasting going on between them now. On the contrary, they glide after each other as gently and sweetly as possible, without any kicking of horses or rumbling of chariot wheels. And one may conclude that after the first flush of feeling cooled down, they were better able to look round them and judge dispassionately of each other. And, lo and behold! they discovered at last that there were just two portions of the globe, where each had in turn his own way as nearly as possible for six whole months at a time; viz., at the Poles: and that yet, nevertheless, the brilliant consequences which they had insisted would occur under these circumstances, never took place. On the contrary, those were the dreariest and most desolate portions of the whole globe,—barren wastes of ice and rock, where both animal and vegetable life were at the lowest possible ebb. Nothing could be more mortifying, it must be owned. In vain did Shiny-mane drive round and round that frozen horizon with a light that was never interrupted: where was the promised Paradise

which was to follow?—the foliage, the flowers, the fruits, the precious crops which should have adorned this unchecked reign of Day, where were they? The dove would have sought in vain here for even a shrub on which to rest her foot. Scarcely a wandering seagull ever disturbed the death-like stillness of the air. Day, the lifegiver, looked down upon a kingdom without life! What wonder if he began at last to distrust himself! What wonder if he went on to suspect that there might be some truth in what Night had said after all! That she might in some way or other be Night the restorer; in some way, however mysterious and unaccountable, be necessary to his own prosperity.

And it was the same with Night, when her turn came round. In vain did Frosty-mane distil his dews. They were useful—at least Night thought so—everywhere else; but here, what did they avail? Here was the unbroken rest which was to recruit and refresh all Nature: now her secret powers might work as they pleased: there was no waste of power now either from labour or heat, or any other destructive cause: but where were the giant races of man and beast and plant that were to arise in consequence? The wear and tear of life had stopped, but what was the Earth advantaged? Night, the restorer, ruled, but over a kingdom where there was nothing to restore! Well might tears mingle with her dews. Well might she call to the morning stars to bring back that Day whom once she had dreaded as a rival, but now longed for as a friend. Day the lifegiver, he had called himself, and Day the lifegiver perhaps he was. Certainly without him she could do nothing; at any rate here, where he was not, the whole earth was a blank!

They had made a terrible mistake, that was clear; and if they did not at first see that there must be other and more important powers at work besides theirs, or the good old earth would not be what it is in most places, they must be excused. People cannot grow quite wise all at once, and they had made a very good beginning by learning to distrust themselves;

that being always the first step towards doing justice to a neighbour.

"I called you Day the destroyer, bright and beautiful friend," murmured Night, in her softest tones; "you who bring light over my shadows, and make my good deeds known to all men. Day, the lifegiver, forgive me, and return at the seasons appointed. Touch the earth with your glory from time to time, lest all things perish from its face, and it and I are forgotten together."

"But I mistook your friendly shadow for that of death," answered Day, with his sweetest smile, though tears trembled in his eyes as he thought of the past injustice, causing the brightest of rainbows to span the landscape below: "and that was a thousand times worse! You, in whose silence and rest the very fountains of life are renewed. Ah, while earth remains what it is, an everlasting day—a day without night—would be destruction! Dear friend, forgive me, and ever and ever return."

"There is nothing to forgive," whispered Night, as she came round once more. "And death also may restore as I do," added she tenderly; for the harvest moon was shining upon long fields of golden corn, some waving still, some gathered into sheaves; and she felt particularly hopeful about everything.

"Any how we are friends—loving, helpful friends," sang Day.

"Friends—comforting and abiding friends," echoed Night in return, as the weary world sank on her bosom; eyes closing, limbs relaxing, and flowers folding, as if the angel of rest had come down from heaven.

And friends they were and remain, though long ages have passed away since the time the old northern tales tell of; and though now the wise men will not allow that Night and Day drive round the world in cars with horses to them. Well, perhaps they don't. Perhaps it is really true that the earth is

a dark ball, hanging in the open space which we call the firmament of heaven, moving slowly round the shining sun, but spinning like a top all the time itself, so that first one side and then the other faces the brightness; and thus there is a constant change from light to darkness and darkness to light going on all over the world; and this makes Day and Night. But no matter which way the changes come. Night and Day are the work of the Lord; and, like all the other "works of the Lord" which the three children in the fiery furnace called upon to praise Him, have a voice, and say many things worth listening to, especially now that they are no longer young and foolish. And from time to time, according as we keep our ears open or shut, little streams of melody do float round us from the natural world, as musical sounds break out from the strings of an old-fashioned *Æolian* harp when the wind blows over it, or sweep along the wires of the electric telegraph on breezy days. Listen only, and you will hear. And which speaks you can surely guess, for they praise each other now and not themselves. One sings—

"Dear Night, whom once I dreaded as the dark end of life and enjoyment. Dear Night, whom now I know as the forerunner of life renewed. Welcome, blessed restorer; take our worn-out child to your bosom. Drop over her striving and straining your mantle of repose. All her day-labourers grow weary, for a portion of life goes from them, in the toil of limb and of muscle, in the working of eye and of brain; in all the changes that circle round an ever-changing world. Restore what thou canst and may'st, let the rest remain in hope; for the mercy thou bringest now, foreshadows a greater in store. Oh, type of the mighty change which must one day pass upon all; of the deep mysterious rest in which all things shall be renewed; of the needful, hopeful death which quickens unto life! Dear Night, my sister and friend, the twilight shades approach, and I see in thankful peace your darker shadows beyond."

And the other answers in turn.

"Dark and secret my mission; men call me Night the gloomy; but I hold in my bosom the germs of a glory full of hope; hiddenly working within, till thou, the lifegiver, returnest, to break through the mists and shadows, and touch my nurslings with light. So, at the first creation, at the touch of the first young dawn, lo! gleams of life universal were lit all over the world, and nature, amazed, awoke in songs of thanksgiving and joy.

"So come, then, Day the lifegiver, ever and ever reviving the slumbering germs I nourish, the hidden life I feel. Welcome for this, but thrice welcome as type of a dayspring eternal, that shall dawn at last on the night of sin and sorrow and death; when, our secret missions accomplished, our secret workings completed, thou and I, oh, life-giving Day, shall merge our blessings in one:—when the light that never wastes, and the life that never wearies, shall be one with the rest eternal, that remaineth evermore!"







KICKING.



KICKING.

"Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft."—1 SAM. xv. 23.

THREE years of complete liberty, and then to have to learn in three short weeks to submit entirely to the will of other people!

This sounds a hard plan of education, and perhaps is not the very best one possible. Still, thousands of young colts have turned into good horses upon it; and if there is to be a reform, it must come from above, not from below. Reforms from below savour of rebellion, and that is sure to lead to a reaction the wrong way again.

Yet people ought not to blind themselves—those above, I mean, any more than those below. Every man, therefore, ought to sit from time to time in his neighbour's chair, and look with his neighbour's eyes, from his neighbour's position, at what he himself is about. It is wonderful how much wiser, as well as kinder, people grow if they do this.

And among a man's neighbours he should not be ashamed to reckon the creatures he collects round him for his own convenience and amusement, and calls his "domestic animals." Why "domestic," but that he has taken them from their own natural homes, and brought them to his? And if so, surely it is not

too much to ask that he should give them, each in his degree, the comforts of a home citizenship, in return for the duties he exacts. If he does this honestly, a few errors of judgment on his part will not matter more than a few errors of conduct on theirs; for imperfection has not only to be struggled against, but borne in this world.

1 Sitting in neighbour Firefly the spirited young chestnut colt's chair, then, it is but fair to own that he may well have felt it queer, after three years' luxury of doing as he liked in large grassy pastures, to find himself suddenly cooped up in a small square stuffy place, ceiled in instead of open to the air, and surrounded by walls, to one particular part of which he was fastened by a horrible contrivance that went round his head and neck, and gave him a most unpleasant pull whenever he tried to get away. But yesterday he was free as the wind, so far as the hedges extended—could gallop from one to the other while his breath lasted; might snort at the passengers in the road which skirted the field as much as he pleased; throw out his legs at everything and everybody; kick, plunge, bound, jump till he was tired; whinny at his companions, whether he had anything worth saying or not; and all this at will: while now—but the contrast is too painful to dwell upon, for Firefly was now in a horse-breaker's stable, with a halter round his neck.

He had one consolation however, and it is not a small one to most people—indeed it ought always to be a matter of thankfulness to all—he was extremely well fed. It is true, the very delicious grain he had now been chumping at three separate meals to his heart's content, with his nose bent over the manger, had been very dearly purchased by the loss of his freedom the morning before. The wild driving he had undergone from the field to the stable-yard, with the treacherous capture at the end, still rankled in his mind, and the cruel outrage to his young heart's nervous shyness, when hands of violent men overcame him, and the fatal noose was slipped over his head, was not to be forgotten. Still taste is taste; the food remained delicious

all the same, and he was so young, he could enjoy the present, irrespective of the past or future.

But all feeds of corn come to an end at last; and at the end of the first he began to fidget, after the second he grew angrily impatient, and when he had swallowed the third, he became what is called (archaically) *rampageous*, for in point of fact the good corn had begun to warm his blood. It was very high living compared to the cold grass he had been used to.

Now, as was natural, one of the first things he did was to call out for his old companions of the field, and this he did in colt's fashion of course; but what colt's fashion really is will not be known till men become good linguists, and have learnt other languages besides those of their own race. At present they are miserably backward in that branch of learning, and have no idea even of what flies talk about, though they hear them murmuring away in the air as soon as they themselves awake every summer morning, and for nearly all day after.

Well, in colt's fashion Firefly shouted for his companions, and after two or three attempts, each of them louder than the one before, must have made himself heard; for at last he was answered, though from what seemed a great distance, so smothered were the sounds. But this was only because they came through stone walls. In point of fact, his young friends, Whitefoot and Silverstar by name, were very near—namely, in the very next adjoining stable—both of them captives like himself; both of them with halters round their necks, one in one stall, one in another.

. Conversation was difficult under such circumstances, and could not be carried on long. What they did say, when they discovered they were near each other, amounted to about this:—

“So you are somewhere hereabouts, too, Whitefoot and Silverstar. Why don't you come where I am? Where are you?”

"We don't know where we are. Where are you? Why don't you come to us?"

"Because something twitches my head if I try to move away; so I can't."

"That's just what happens to us; so we can't."

"It's abominable!"

"It's very distressing."

"I wonder what it means! I am very angry."

"We wonder too, but it can't be helped."

Here the dialogue ended, for the colts were not the only inhabitants of the two stables. In the one, with Whitefoot and Silverstar, was a good-tempered, middle-aged, Welsh pony, known all over the country-side as good old Taffy. In the other, with Firefly, was an old, half-bred white Arabian mare, whose mother had been brought from the East.

Old people who talk to young ones should think of the young ones more than themselves. If they want to gossip and grumble, and let off vexed feelings, let them do it to each other. Life is very trying sometimes as age comes on, and those of the same age can understand the feelings of the age, and make allowance for the groanings of the natural man. But young creatures may easily be led away by a few sad or passionate words, into believing all sorts of nonsense. I say, then, let old people unburden their personal feelings to each other, but never talk anything but useful sense, or pleasant nonsense, to a child.

Had the old white mare in the stable thought of this, it would have been better for Firefly—perhaps, at least, he would not have had the same encouragement to turn out unmanageable which she now gave him. For no sooner had he uttered the words, "I wonder what it means! I am very angry," to his companions next door, than she shook her own halter till the rattle roused his attention, and then observed, in a tone of melancholy which was of itself quite impressive:—"I can tell

you what it means, but I am afraid when you know you will not be less angry than now, but rather more."

Firefly's quick blood ran quicker at the startling announcement.

"Oh, dear, what makes you say so? Who can you be?" cried he in excitement.

"One who ought to know something, if age and experience can instruct," answered the sorrowful old mare, adding, in a lower tone still, "or if unusual opportunities in early life have not been lost upon her."

"I am almost afraid of hearing, yet suspense is intolerable," cried Firefly. "Where am I? What is going to happen?"

"You are a prisoner, at the mercy of those who shut you up," answered the old mare, to whose monotonous existence the power of lashing a young colt up to indignation was rather an amusing novelty. "It is the first time this has happened to you, I suppose?"

"It is the first time I was ever made fast in this way," groaned Firefly. "If I was ever in an enclosure before, it was loose by my mother's side. My memory is confused so far back."

"I, too, had a mother once," murmured the old mare, Egeria; and her grief in thinking how long ago made her pause.

"Tell me about her," exclaimed Firefly; "what became of her? I want to know."

"What a tone you speak in," answered Egeria. "You want to know! You forget you are a prisoner, and must learn to want nothing but what is given you."

"I shall never learn that," cried he; "and why am I a prisoner? tell me that."

"Because the people you belong to want to make you useful—useful to *them*, that is."

"And why must I be useful to them? Why may I not

please myself as I have done before? What are *they* to me?"

"Ask *them*," said Egeria, coldly. "They will tell you—masters, superiors."

"You provoke me," cried Firefly, stamping into the straw at his feet. "Tell me why I am here, as you promised. My former history is short enough, as you shall hear. I—"

"Spare yourself the trouble," interrupted Egeria; "our histories in this country are all alike. We are left to ourselves for nearly three years, and are taught nothing; then our superiors get hold of us, by fright and force, and in three weeks make us learn everything they want."

"And then?" gasped Firefly.

"And then it depends upon the people into whose hands one falls, whether one is well or ill-used."

"And you have borne all this in patience?" asked Firefly.

"I had no heart to act otherwise," sighed Egeria. "I felt no spirit to resist."

"But I feel plenty of spirit, and *shall* resist," cried the young chestnut, straining against the halter as hard as he could bear, and dashing his legs against the sides of the stall, first on one side, then on the other.

"But what can you do?" whined Egeria, a little startled by his violence.

"Do?" shouted Firefly; "why, I shall kick, kick, kick!" And each time he uttered the word he struck out against the wooden partition between the stalls. Egeria began to be alarmed.

"I do not advise it," she said; "I assure you it will do no good. You had better bear it all as well as you can."

"Oh, that is all very well for those who can receive it, old lady," exclaimed Firefly: "I can't. I can't stand injustice; and, what's more, I won't. Why my blood is boiling already. Only to think of the way they drove us along before they got us here. Of course, if I had known, I should never have left

the field. And the still worse fright those men gave me when they all laid hold of me and threw this horrible thing over my head! It's all treachery and injustice from beginning to end."

"Ah! if we were but in my mother's country!" sighed Egeria.

"Why, what then?" inquired Firefly.

"Oh, my poor young friend, I'm afraid it will do more harm than good to tell you," said Egeria; "yet, if you wish it so very much, I hardly know how to refuse."

The old goose, to consent to tell what she felt might do harm! But she was vain of knowing more than other people on the subject, which she really did. Besides which, she wanted to stop Firefly's kicking and plunging, by holding his attention. So said she—

"The people there—in the East, I mean—treat young colts quite differently from the people here. As soon as ever they can leave their mothers, they are brought among the tents, where the men, women, and children live, and the women take care of them, and feed them, and pet them. So they get used to their masters from the first, and there is not the fright and horror and startling change to go through, which we suffer so much from at the end of our first three years; and so the halter, and teaching, and all that sort of thing, come much easier—though, of course, restraint is restraint everywhere. But, for pity's sake, don't begin to kick again," concluded Egeria, interrupting herself at the sound of renewed struggles on Firefly's part. "I have been telling you my mother's story to keep you quiet."

"Quiet!" shouted the miserable colt. "I won't be quiet, to please anybody. How can I be quiet, when I want to get away from this savage country, and go to that other one—that East you talk of—where colts are properly managed?"

"But, my dear young friend, consider—it's too late," expostulated Egeria. "You can't begin life over again. You really musn't let your feelings run away with you in this

foolish way. People here don't mean badly, altogether. They are tolerably kind, on the whole; at least, some of them are. They feed you well, as you see; and after you have learnt what they teach, you will be glad, though you won't like it while it's going on."

"Then it shan't go on!" shouted Firefly. "They shan't teach me! I won't learn! I won't have their food, or their kindness! If they had brought me up properly, I could have submitted as well as anybody; but they have been unjust, and now I won't! I'll do something—I'll go to the East; and if I can't go to the East, I'll kick!"

"Oh, hush!—do, pray, hush!" said Egeria, who, to do her justice, had merely wanted to excite a sympathetic grumble, not to rouse a storm. "You go much too far, I assure you."

"*You* say that, because you have no spirit, you poor old creature!" exclaimed Firefly. "You know you havn't—you said so yourself, just now; but that's no rule for me."

"If I have not much spirit," remarked Egeria, "I may have some sense, and I want you to have some too. You can't get away, to begin with—so the East is out of the question; and you cannot resist these people to any purpose—so, take my advice, submit and have done with it. I can tell you, from long experience, that kicking is never of any use."

"Then I shall go on kicking, out of spite, *because* it's of no use," cried Firefly; and as he announced this grand resolution, he broke out all over into a profuse sweat from excitement.

At which moment the stable-door opened, and the horse-breaker stepped in, just to have a look at the colt; and after doing so, and observing his irritable and uneasy condition, said he to himself, "I shall have a good deal of trouble with *this* one, I'm afraid."

Now, in saying this, he was making a sort of comparison between Firefly and the other two; for he had just been in the next stable, and seen Whitefoot and Silverstar unusually placid and quiet—for fresh-caught colts, that is to say;

nobody expects from a kitten the gravity of a cat. But what wonder? Besides that they were greys, and therefore easier-tempered by nature than was to be expected from a chestnut (for in horses, colour and disposition are apt to go together), they had been hearing nothing but good advice ever since they were shut up—and, what is more, they had actually been attending to it!

But, then, good old Taffy gave his good old advice in such a very pleasant way! “My dear friends,” cried he, when he heard them plunging about in their stalls at first, “I do feel so sorry for you—so very, very sorry—because I know so well what you suffer. Just the same was done with me when I was your age.”

“Oh, how did you bear it?” asked the colts.

“Well, well, I was very impatient just at the beginning,” answered Taffy; “for my Welsh blood made me chafe at the confinement, and I was alone, and had nobody to explain the meaning of it all to me, so it was hard work; and this makes me particularly glad to be here just now to help you. I can tell you a great deal that will comfort you, and plenty more that will surprise and amuse you very much. There are two sides to everything, even to things that vex one, I assure you! But, quiet!—quiet! dear friends, I do beg,” continued he, as he heard more plunging and shaking of halters, “or I shall not be able to say another word!”

“We will be quiet,” cried the colts, for they liked the idea of being surprised and amused, as who does not?

Then Taffy told them they were not brought here to be teased to death, as they had perhaps supposed, but to prepare them for being taught a thousand nice things which they would never be able to do if they were not taught, and which it was immensely jolly to be able to do, when the teaching was once over; and he proceeded to hold forth on the pleasures of trotting, cantering, and galloping over the country, with a good feed of corn, a comfortable stable, and a valet to rub one down

at the end; as also the delightful excitements of racing and hunting, which even he had enjoyed, though only as a looker on; but he added, that they couldn't have a share in all this, without first learning to obey their masters, and love them a little bit too.

Whereupon both colts shuddered all over, for their horror of the men who had shut them up was very great, and love seemed perfectly impossible.

"Ah! you can't bear the thought of this, I see," cried Taffy. "Well, of course, if it could be, one would like to have no master but oneself—eh, my friends?"

To which both Whitefoot and Silverstar agreed, with a whinny of satisfaction.

"But what is the use of fretting oneself, by wishing for what can't be," pursued Taffy. "These men and women are, though I don't know how, or why, our masters and superiors, and I know from my own experience, that we are happiest when we submit to their wishes with a good grace; when we struggle and resist we are miserable."

"But suppose they wish something cruel and unjust?" sighed Silverstar.

"But who is to decide what is so?" asked Taffy in return. "Many things seem so that are not; your being here against your will, for instance—you will be so glad about it by-and-by, when the teaching is finished."

"It is comfortable to hear that," murmured Silverstar.

"Is the teaching itself very unpleasant?" asked Whitefoot.

"*Very*," cried Taffy at once, at the mere recollection of it, and the colts shuddered again. "But here I am," he continued, "none the worse, and all the better, and as happy as possible, with a man or woman, or a little child on my back three or four times a week, and a pet with all the family. Oh! you have no notion how good-natured these men very often are—bringing one tit-bits both in the stable and field—bread, or apples, or carrots, or clover, which one takes out of their hands.

But for pity's sake don't begin kicking again," cried he, as he heard them flinging wildly about, at the notion of men coming so near. "Why, you surely wouldn't kick at kindness? You must meet it half way, when it's offered, you foolish fellows, or you may live to want it before you die! But, don't alarm yourselves! You won't be able to be on these intimate terms with masters and superiors, till you've learnt to be well-mannered and obedient. But my experience tells me they are kind when we are good; and where they seem otherwise, I try to believe it is because we don't understand the meaning of what they are doing;—with superiors one can't expect that one should."

A word spoken in season, how good is it! The colts grew calmer and calmer as Taffy went on, and when, in conclusion, he told them a story about a good-natured lady, who used to bring him handfuls of oats in reward of a pretty trick he learnt of opening the stable-door with his nose, they half began to believe that these men and women were not, after all, such dreadful creatures as they had supposed.

And as it was just then that the horsebreaker entered the stable to look at them, it is not to be wondered at that they bore his presence with only about half the horror they would otherwise have felt, and so kept tolerably quiet.

And thus a week went on, Taffy encouraging them by his own example and experience, to bear what was coming with patience and in hope.

And he could but speak from his own experience, poor Taffy! Let us trust, then, that in these "days of advance" there are fewer and fewer exceptions to the rule, that a docile horse makes a kind master. Shame on the master if it does not!

It was at the end of the first week that the real trial began for all three colts, and a trial indeed it was! They have hard hearts who would deny it. Those heavy iron bits forced into the young, tender mouths; so stiff against their teeth, so cold

against their flesh, how horrible they were! And the bridles that pulled at them, forcing the poor heads to turn hither and thither, for mere whim's sake, as it seemed (for whatever reason there was for it, *they* could not find it out)—what a cruel contrivance! Then the long whips, which kept them at one distance all the time, so that, as they were forced to move on continually, they had no choice but to go round and round in a circle for ever—how irritating! My heart bleeds when I think of it, and imagine the two long hours of struggle on that first dreadful day. How severe the trial must have been to them—must ever be to all!

Worse still, however, when in the course of a few days, the corners of the mouths became sore from the pressure of the iron, and there was, for a time, the pain of a raw wound, as well as a day-by-day longer time of restraint to endure.—Masters and superiors, verily, there is a great responsibility in your hands! Nevertheless, it is not for the colts to sit in judgment.

Now then, how fared the three colts under the terrible but, at present, in some way or other, necessary training? (For even Egeria could not answer Firefly's maddened inquiries, by saying that in the East the bit and bridle and whip can be dispensed with.) Well, Whitefoot and Silverstar set out by intending to submit if possible, and therefore, though more or less cheerfully at some times than others, and with more or less pain to themselves, they contrived to manage it at last.

Firefly, on the contrary, started by a sort of resistance-on-principle plan. Wishing to resist, in fact, he always found a reason for resisting. If people treated him properly he could submit as well as any one else, he was sure; but if they ill-used him, what could they expect but that he should kick—kick—kick? And as to what proper treatment was, he made himself the sole judge. Certainly the training process just described was not proper, but on the contrary cruel and unjust, and accordingly kick, kick, kick he went, whenever it was possible.

In vain Egeria begged him to forbear, seeing too late how much mischief her folly had done.

"It is so senseless to resist when you can't help yourself," said she.

"It is so mean to yield to an unjust necessity!" cried he.

And she dared not contradict herself so far as to suggest, that it might not be so unjust as it seemed.

"Will you listen to me once more?" asked she, one day.

"If you talk sense, yes," replied Firefly, "not otherwise, old lady."

Egeria sighed; for his pert folly was but a stretched-out shadow of her own. Imperfect judgments; judgments formed on half-known grounds; judgments formed by the lesser intelligence concerning a greater which it cannot comprehend—what rebellion and ruin have they not caused!

"It is sense, if you have sense to find it out," cried Egeria, sharply. "It is downright wisdom. What I am going to say is truth and fact."

"I hear you; go on," said Firefly, impatiently.

"Well, if you go on kicking in this manner, every time you think you have—I beg your pardon—every time you have a reason for kicking, you know, you will get into such a habit of kicking, that you will do it whether you have a reason or not."

"Shall I!" shouted Firefly, with contempt.

"Yes, you *will* though!" persisted Egeria, vexed alike by his obstinacy and ridicule. "If you kick every time you can find or make an excuse, you will be very apt to kick on when you have none."

"I have never yet kicked without a reason, old lady, and I don't intend to do so," answered Firefly.

"I know, I know," replied Egeria, "so far you have always proved yourself right to *yourself*: what the horse-breaker thinks is another matter. But, dear friend, try and believe me,—habits are such tremendous things! If you don't

get into a habit of giving way, you mayn't be able to give way when you want, that's what I am afraid of. Those who indulge themselves in kicking at all, will sometimes kick when they would give worlds to forbear."

"How can that happen to me, when I never kick without a reason?" cried Firefly.

At which moment he was fetched from the stable for a morning's lesson, and Egeria was left to fret alone. For fret she did, not being a bad creature on the whole, but such an inconsiderate old simpleton, both in her way of viewing life and talking about it to others!

And alas! there was but too much cause for fretting, when at the end of five weeks Firefly remained still untamed—still in the horsebreaker's hands! A fortnight ago both Whitefoot and Silverstar had taken leave of the place, had finished their education with respectability, and gone out into the world on their own account. There are plenty of good masters to be found for docile, well-taught creatures, and they had been picked up at once by two neighbouring families, and often met in their rides, and talked over old times. Egeria heard of this from Taffy, who, from being constantly out, learnt all the news of the country-side, and had once or twice met his friends himself; and it must be owned she regretted Firefly's conduct all the more, that she feared she had had some share in it herself.

When Firefly was led out of the stable after Egeria had spoken, he had, for a few minutes, a misgiving that there might be some truth in what she had said. But the first crack of the horsebreaker's whip made his heart as hard as ever. He had accustomed himself for so long to look upon it, and him, and the whole affair, as a system of barbarous injustice, that he could not have rid himself of the notion without a strong effort, and there was one great difficulty to his making it—namely, that he must acknowledge himself to have been in the wrong before. And alas! he did not make it; and so another week went on, at the end of which the horsebreaker lost patience, and told

Firefly's owner he was a hopeless kicker, and a very ill-conditioned animal as to temper, though otherwise with many good points, and a valuable beast.

It was not very pleasant news to the owner, but Firefly was so handsome in appearance, and moreover, so strong and able to work, that he was undertaken at last by a very fearless young squire, who cared for little but pace and beauty, had a seat like a rock, put his faith in a strong curb, and had no scruple in using his spurs.

What Firefly underwent in his hands I do not wish to describe, though, even there, if he would but have submitted, his fate would not have been bad, for if the master loved galloping, so did Firefly himself. But again and again he would refuse to obey the curb, if it checked or turned him suddenly when his face was set elsewhere; and then like an instinct came the impulse to kick, kick, kick! and he followed it. For an hour sometimes the two would battle together—the spur and the whip and the curb, against that insane determination to kick, kick, kick! And as to be conquered by main force and exhaustion is not to be reformed, Firefly was led away bleeding and foam-covered to his stable, as savage as when he left it, and still repeating the old strain, “If people treat me properly, I can submit as well as any one else; but if they don't, what can they expect but that I shall kick, kick, kick?” Like the horsebreaker's whim of driving him round in an everlasting circle, seemed the young squire's whim of checking him, and turning him round when he didn't expect it, and wanted to go straight on. He kicked, therefore, strictly on principle, and all the more when the injustice was enforced by the spur and the lash. So the squire got tired of his purchase, and Firefly was sold again.

But this time to a very knowing hand, a country doctor, who after trying different plans in turn—low feed and good feed, kindness and severity, and finding both unsuccessful, took him back to the horsebreaker. “He seems very hopeless at pre-

sent," remarked he; "he kicks for nothing. But there is one more chance. Break him in for harness. Kicking-straps will perhaps bring him to his senses. At any rate try; he has many good qualities, and is a fine fellow. I hope he'll do well."

The horsebreaker shook his head, and led Firefly back to his old stable. Another colt occupied his former stall, but there were still two vacant. He was led into the middle one, and before nightfall Egeria was brought into the third.

Firefly told his story at length, and was too eager to hear Egeria's shuffles of impatience. "How unfortunate some people are!" observed she, when he ended; but there was a slight mockery in her tone.

"I have been so all along," said he; "I believe I am fated to ill-usage."

"People always are who will go nobody's way but their own," was Egeria's answer; "why don't you do what is wanted? Go the way your master pulls you, and give up fighting for your own."

"If people treat me properly, I can submit—"

"Oh, do stop!" cried Egeria, "I've heard that much too often. You never *do* submit."

"Because they never—"

"Oh, they, they, they! Would they be masters, if you, and not they, were to lead the way?"

"Oh, as to *masters*, perhaps I have my own opinion," cried Firefly; "I wonder who has been master of the two I have had! But no matter about that. I could have borne leading, but I wouldn't be dragged. It was the curb and spurs and whip of that young squire I kicked against."

"And of your last master, the doctor, when he was kind?" asked Egeria.

"He wasn't always kind," muttered Firefly.

"But when he was?" insisted the old mare.

"Fool!" murmured Firefly, between his teeth; "was I

likely to go his fidgety way—stopping at one house, then at another; no sooner started than having to stop; twisted down one lane and up another, never having a good run all the time; I, who had galloped over half a country-side in a morning with the squire? Kick! why who wouldn't kick at a life like that?"

"It is as I feared," exclaimed Egeria. "Anybody who wants to kick, can find a reason for it, of course." And she spoke not another word, for she did not understand the matter to the bottom, as Taffy did; and so her way of argument was not convincing.

The first thing in the morning, however, Firefly spoke to her. He had a question to ask. Did she know what *kicking-straps* were? Perfectly; what made him want to know?

He repeated what the doctor had said.

"Capital!" said Egeria. "If you are put into those you will never be able to kick again."

"We shall see about that," groaned Firefly, grinding his teeth as if he were champing oats. "Masters—masters—masters, indeed! . . ."

In which state of mind he was taken out, two hours afterwards, put into kicking-straps, and had his first lesson of going in harness. The plan answered at first; but this was only while the shock of surprise and helplessness lasted. Still, being rather less wild, the horsebreaker returned him as "fit for harness, if driven in kicking-straps;" and Egeria twitted him when he left her, as being "fairly caught at last." "We shall see about that," muttered Firefly, fuming to himself, as the doctor drove him home. But the kicking-straps were amazingly strong, and he restrained himself. Nevertheless, the first principles of submission had not entered his head, and Egeria's folly and ridicule had done all that an unwise friend could do to confuse the truth.

The truth? Ah, we can only get at that by sitting in our neighbour's chair, and looking with his eyes. Had Firefly

done this, he would have known why the kicking-straps were added to his harness, and have laid the blame on the right shoulders. As it was, he laid the blame on the doctor, and considered himself the victim of injustice.

So, one unlucky day, after a round of rather tiresome visiting, a very slight correction for impatience, set his blood working; and, without thinking either of kicking-straps or consequences, he took the bit between his teeth, laid his ears down, close to his head, muttering, "Masters, indeed!" to himself, and pulling madly at the reins, dashed at full speed down the narrow country-lane. They stopped him at last at a turnpike-gate, and as the kicking-straps had given way soon after he started, he concluded the day's work by smashing the splash-board to pieces, his master escaping with difficulty.

So he was sent back to the market-town, and resold.

It is impossible to pursue him through all his adventures; they were all, so to speak, variations upon the same set of notes—the battle of authority with one who refused to acknowledge its claims. A miserable struggle, whether of man or beast; whether against the powers ordained of God, or the God of power Himself; whether breaking out into open contest, or indulged in by inward repining.

At last, poor Firefly fell into the hands of a regular horse-dealer, who forwarded him to a neighbourhood where his tricks were not known, and after some weeks of low diet and constant work, sold him (more shame for the fact) to a quiet country clergyman, for a birthday present to his daughter, just bursting into the beauty of girlhood.

Now, by this time, our friend Firefly had had experience enough to discover that his habit of opposition was constantly bringing him into trouble. And though he was not sick of the bad habit, he was decidedly sick of the trouble, and every now and then was vexed with himself for giving way to it. And now and then he recalled Egeria's words, "Those who indulge themselves in kicking at all, will sometimes kick when they

would give worlds to forbear." Still, he could not remember a single case in which he had kicked without a very good reason—as it seemed to him:—so he assured himself at least, and tried to forget that Egeria had also said, "Anybody who wants to kick can find a reason for kicking, of course!"

Now at last, however, came Firefly's halcyon days. What more could heart of horse desire than to belong to a gentle young girl, who was ready to love him, not only as her servant, but companion and friend? Egeria's tales of Eastern kindness came back to his mind again and again, as his new mistress brought him delicate morsels which she would fain have him eat from her hand; and when, as was generally the case, he could not overcome his repugnance, but started back from her caresses, all she said was, the poor fellow was nervous and shy; perhaps—who knew?—he had at some time or other been harshly used.

"This is as it should be," remarked Firefly; and he began to think better than ever of himself. The few misgivings he had lately had went to sleep. "*I was right, and not Egeria,*" thought he, as he bore his light burden over her favourite haunt, the Downs, "*I was right, and Egeria wrong. I told her I had never kicked without a reason, and never should. It was nonsense about not being able to leave off.*"

And so he really believed, till, alas! the renewed good living brought back the impatience as well as fire into his blood, and what had he to restrain them with, who had not got the law in his heart? There followed one other week of self-confidence and enjoyment, and then . . .

. . . She was not in the least to blame—that beautiful young girl who had been so kind to him. He admitted this even to himself, when he saw her stretched at his feet; the eyes that had looked so kindly at him, closed; the rich black hair surrounding the white cheeks and forehead like a pall—the groom so horror-struck when he came up, that he never thought of even laying hold of Firefly's bridle.

They had been out for a morning ride on the Downs, and she had wished to canter. For a day or two past, some evil spirit (evil spirits are so ingenious) had been whispering in his ear, that to be patronized was all very well, if it were not another form of unjust restraint. Masters? had he not proved himself the master in every case yet? And so he had done here—here, where, as Egeria had prophesied, he would have given worlds to forbear. Now rose before him the only half-valued tenderness, the anxiety for his daily comfort, the little personal sacrifices in his favour, and this as the conclusion; that because the canter had been prolonged, and she had wished to rest, and so checked him with the bridle, the old habit had proved too strong for him, and prompted him to kick, kick, kick!—and he had kicked till she was stretched at his feet. . . .

More than an hour passed, and Firefly stood by her still. Stood in the same spot, seeing the same sight, without care to go his own way, now that he might have done it at will.

And then came the trampling of feet, horses and other men, and among them all a father in the first agony of despair. But no one noticed Firefly—he was nothing to his masters then, and so he stood on there like a horse of marble, in the same old place, looking at what he had done.

But presently some one who had been touching her wrist and had sprinkled her with water, whispered, “She is coming to herself!”

And it was true. Firefly’s mistress had been stunned and one arm was hurt, but she awoke again to life; and when the poor father had wept out his joy on her neck, and she had looked up, she smiled to see so near them the creature who had caused this evil. Yes, there he stood, and his eye watched hers, as it first glanced at him, and then fixed on her father’s face anxiously, while she murmured, “Promise me one thing, dear father. Let poor Firefly go to Rarey to be cured.”

Masters?—*They* may well be masters and superiors, in whom the abiding spirit of forgiveness and love is triumphant!

So Firefly was taken to Rarey; but what then happens to horses must be looked for in other books. This does not contain an argument on the merits of the different methods of horsebreaking; only thus much as regards Rarey's process is the turning point of the tale. The object aimed at is the subjection of the will, not merely the control of the body,—the full and complete recognition of the mastership and superiority of man. This, and this only, is what is wanted when the legs are tied up, and struggles rendered powerless by force, so that the indignant animal is brought through exhaustion of body to submission of feeling. He has plunged, he has kicked, he has reared, for hours together, if he will have it so; but the man stands by him unscathed, unruffled, and still kind:—his master and superior—the terrible discipline proves it; but still kind—and the kindness proves it too.

All this Firefly went through; and when the Rarey-breaker "gentled" him all over his miserable frame, as he lay panting and overpowered on the sawdust, conquered and convinced at last, all his mistakes and misconceptions of other people came before him, as plainly as if Taffy himself had spoken them; so plainly, that he wondered at himself. But remembering his old and all-too-firmly-adhered-to resolution to kick, kick, kick, whenever he was vexed, a fresh outbreak of perspiration astonished the breaker so much, that he "gentled" and soothed the troubled spirit more and more tenderly, till Firefly could think of nothing like it but the father and daughter comforting each other on the Downs, that terrible day of his guilt.

And thus at last, he learnt that it was possible for submission and love and happiness to go hand in hand together. Firefly was cured.

And then he was taken back to a home which he helped in his degree, however humble, to make what a home should be;—a circle in which animals, superior and inferior, should all work together, each after its measure and kind, for the comfort and pleasure of all.

At last, therefore, he gave a willing obedience to every touch of his dear young lady's rein; and yet he feared her no longer as before; and yet he loved her more! Which is a great mystery, but the world repeats it in a thousand forms.

Animals under man—servants under masters—children under parents—wives under husbands—men under authorities—nations under rulers—all under God,—it is the same with all:—in obedience of will is the only true peace.

Happy the colts who learn submission without a lifetime of personal struggle! Happy the men and women who find in the lesser obediences a practice-field of the greater; for assuredly the words of Egeria are true: "Those who indulge themselves in kicking at all, will sometimes kick when they would give worlds to forbear."





IMPERFECT INSTRUMENTS.



IMPERFECT INSTRUMENTS.

“And others’ follies teach us not,
Nor much their wisdom teaches;
And most, of sterling worth, is what
Our own experience preaches.”

TENNYSON.



OVER the old church-tower passed the rooks, on their way from the neighbouring trees, cawing into the fresh morning air as they went. Dew hung yet upon every stone of the building,—on the bits of moss and grass which time had suffered to creep over or between them, here and there,—on the edges of the tombs below. There was no one astir at this early hour of an autumn day to speak to or interrupt the dark-eyed Geronimo, as he strode hurriedly up the pathway to the porch, the church-keys dangling from his hand, and slightly clanking against each other as he stepped.

Behind him followed a rough-haired country lad, but at a little distance, and silent. He had a stick in his hand, however, with which he began to whisk off the wet from the grass-blades of the graves on each side the path; but at one turn and glance from Geronimo, he desisted. Soon the key was in the lock, the bolt had turned, grating, back; the heavy door was pushed open, the shock echoing through the building; and Geronimo and little Roger, the mason’s son, his companion, were walking

up the aisle; on one side of which, at the upper end, in a small transept, stood the organ and choir-seats.

Let me recall that lonely village, nestling in a narrow valley on the borders of Southern Wales, traversed by a rapid streamlet, which ran through it like a silver thread; rich in orchards, embosomed in ancient trees, where rooks had built their nests for generations; where the cuckoo's voice reverberated from surrounding hills. At one extremity was the church, at the other the quiet vicarage; so that the flock were wont to watch about their doorways for the passing by of the Pastor to his sacred office, that they might follow and enter with him into the ark of the visible church on earth, he leading them on their way. It was a pretty custom and a pleasant sight; there was a tone of loyal respect and trust about it, which social progress has, it is to be feared, some tendency to disturb.

Let me recall the old Pastor himself, in his happy, scholarly simplicity; the serenity of submission on his face, for he had undergone a life's long grief. Let me recall him in the days when the time was drawing near for the silver chord to be broken, and when his visions brought him closer and closer to the day of reunion with his dearly-loved Italian wife, who had died when their only child, Geronimo, was but five years old.

And Geronimo was now his father's Curate; a youth fresh from the schools; energetic, enthusiastic, determined even to self-will, a worshipper of system and order; one who had taken for his motto the words of the poet:

“—because right is right, to follow right
Were wisdom in the scorn of consequence.”

The father, on the other hand, past middle age, was old for his years, for the fire of his spirit had died out; but the power of his intellect remained unaltered, as is often the case in fine natures; and an originally widely-educated judgment grew wider and gentler as the river of his life widened out to the everlasting sea. He doubted about his son's motto, therefore, as a

universal rule of life. It had to be considered, said he, whether the "right" you followed, or the "consequence" you scorned, was of the greater vital importance. There was a right and a wrong—he once added as a homely illustration—in the way of cutting a pencil; but if you had to deal with a weak-leaded one, which would not bear long shoulders without breaking, it was better to cut it with short shoulders than waste it altogether. If he had to choose a motto himself, it must be from the broader teaching of St. Paul.

Geronimo listened in impatience. He thought his father's argument a letting down of principle, the homely illustration trivial, and with regard to St. Paul, everybody knew that texts could be found to support almost anything.

It stood thus, then, that the father admired the son for his strength of purpose and purity of intention, yet sometimes wondered what his future would be; but that the son never properly appreciated the father, except for his amiability to himself. He thought him a kind but feeble old man, behind-hand in the lights of the day.

And it was true that while Geronimo had passed from school to college, his father had remained in the narrow valley; and while the kaleidoscope of public opinion was presenting fresh combinations of thought and feeling to the gaze and admiration of the ardent young, the old man was out of the circle of their influence, and judged of them afar off with the mind of a philosopher.

It was, perhaps, a rash arrangement that Geronimo should have come to be his father's Curate; but he had made the offer, and the old man had accepted it with tears of joy. There was, in fact, between them a strong natural affection, overruling all theoretical differences of opinion, as well as a strong sense of parental and filial duty. There was also, perhaps, some hope on both sides of influencing each other for good; and there was, moreover, the unspoken bond of common interest in one grave.

The triangular white marble slab on the chancel-wall of the church bore upon it a name which to both father and son was still the dearest name upon earth, "Maria Maddalena:"—to the old man naturally so, who through so many years had lifted up weary, loving eyes to the golden letters in which it was traced, travelling in spirit to that heaven of heavens whither the taper central angle of the tablet continually pointed.

And the son had his own recollections—dim ones of old embraces from that mother who had so soon passed away—vivid ones of looking upwards to that tablet from his seat in church ever since he was a child—of gazing on the shining words, and the shining emblems above them, the palm branches, the cross, and the star, until their glitter first dazzled and then brought tears to his eyes. Had he tried, by gazing, to get nearer to the bearer of that golden name—the mother, whom every motherless child feels to want so much? Had he hoped to charm her back, he knew not whence, to comfort him, he knew not how?

He could not have answered himself. Children do and feel many things of which they can give no account, and the why, matters so little in comparison with the fact.

Enough that the long-cherished habit of love to the pure white marble slab remained as firm in Geronimo's heart, as if he had been able to reason about its propriety, and justify it by argument.

Judge, then, what he must have suffered when, on his first coming to the place as curate, he felt it his duty to ask permission of his father to have that tablet removed to some other part of the church!

Let us go back to that time, some nine months before the opening of my story, for it was the beginning of Geronimo's practical troubles.

It was a painful scene that took place; Geronimo's voice trembled as he made the request, and his father's heart-wrung "Never!" was followed by a silence equally distressing to

both. Then the old man asked for reasons, and the young one gave them. The kaleidoscope had brought certain proprieties into full observation which had for some time been unnoticed—there was no doubt about that. The tablet was on a wall within the communion rails; it would have been better elsewhere. Private memorials were inappropriate there. Geronimo thought them inappropriate in the church anywhere—the father disputed this—it was the ark of the dead as well as of the living; but were the matter to be done over again, he would place the stone without the rails in preference; as it was, there was no vital principle involved—no sufficient reason, therefore, for the desecrating act of removal.

The son returned to the argument. His father had admitted the objection; was it not then clearly an act of duty to sacrifice personal feeling to the example of right—whether the right were small or great?

“Measure me the measure of the right,” cried the troubled father, “as compared with the impressions it will cause. You cannot drive straight lines through life without knocking over good feelings as well as bad ones, and woe to those who knock down what little there is of good in the world!”

“The right way is a narrow way,” replied the son; “to trim to the prejudices of the ignorant is to sacrifice principle to man-pleasing.” There was more said in the shape of argument than needs to be repeated here—let every one fight the matter out as he will. On the following day, the father had come to a resolution.

“When I am gone,” said he to his son, “and my name is added to hers on the tablet, you may remove it to where you will; and even now, if, on hearing this, you remain offended, you may remove it at once. I warn you, however, that it is my belief your doing so will cause evil rather than good among those whose souls’ health you are bound to consider. You cannot get them to understand your motives, and they will abominate the act. What you lose will be far more, therefore,

than what you will gain. Of my personal feelings I say nothing. On that point I suspect we suffer together. Now, then, do as you please."

If the father hoped, by yielding a point so trying to himself, to set Geronimo an example of giving way, he deceived himself. Geronimo did not accept what he said as an example, but as an acknowledgment of an error that needed rectifying. About any consequences to other people he refused to think at all. Consequences were nothing in matters of duty and principle.

So he went to Roger, the village-mason, explained what he wanted, and gave his orders, announcing his intention of coming himself to assist. But the man stared in astonishment. "You ben't in earnest surely, sir?" said he. "Surely you're never going to pull down your own mother's tombstone? Why, it'll break the old gentleman's heart—and she such a woman as she was!"

"My father has given his consent," said Geronimo, annoyed, but not betraying the smallest impatience.

Roger the mason shook his head, and took up a tool he had laid down, as if intending to return to his work.

"You'll excuse me, Mr. Geronimo; you've, maybe, persuaded him to it. Young people will be young people, I know," remarked Roger; "though it's a downright miracle to me why *you* should want to do it—you, the lady's only son; and such a lady as she was!"

"It's out of no disrespect to my mother, I assure you," expostulated Geronimo.

"I should think not, indeed!" interrupted the mason.

"But," continued Geronimo, "we have all to sacrifice personal feelings, you know, in matters of right and wrong."

Geronimo paused; but the mason was silent—he had no idea what was meant.

"Or where there is a question of propriety in the treatment of holy places," continued the youth; but still the mason stared at him in silence.

"You don't understand me, I think," said Geronimo.

"I'm free to own I don't," answered the mason.

"Will you let me come in and explain myself?" asked the young man.

"Your father's son is welcome in *my* house at any time!" cried Roger, who had at last got hold of an idea he could fully understand; and leading the way along a narrow passage, he ushered his guest into a small parlour, to which he presently called his wife down, having asked permission for her to share in what Mr. Geronimo was going to say.

But let Mr. Geronimo say what he would, neither of his hearers succeeded in comprehending him, though, to do them justice, they tried. There they sat, the mason holding his cap in both hands between his knees, slightly stooping, but looking up at Geronimo from time to time; his wife bolt upright, and never taking her eyes off him for a second. And still they didn't understand! They had two or three ideas of their own in their heads, it is true, which were adverse to Mr. Geronimo's arguments, and perhaps darkened their powers of comprehension. "The Mrs.," as they called her, had been an angel on earth, if ever there was one, and no place could be too good for her stone, they were sure, for wasn't she herself in heaven?—at least, who would ever get there if she wasn't there? And the poor dear gentleman had stood under it every Sunday ever since she was taken, and who'd have the heart to deprive him of the comfort of feeling her so near? If that stone were to be taken away, they shouldn't have *him* there much longer—Mr. Geronimo might depend upon that! Roger's good woman declared she wouldn't see the poor old gentleman standing there alone, as if he'd never had a wife, for all the world, if she could help it.—Take down his own mother's tombstone! as if her name wasn't a credit anywhere, and a good example into the bargain,—Mr. Geronimo couldn't be thinking of what he was saying! And Roger protested that if he never had another job in all his life, he wouldn't have this. But Mr. Geronimo

was young, put in the wife, and hadn't come to his feelings; he would think better of it presently. They wished him a very good morning, and hoped he would call again.

Mr. Geronimo bit his lips as he left the house. Learning!—authority!—what had become of them? What had he done with them? What could he have done with them against such stolid country heads? Entirely spoilt into the bargain, thought he—the fruit of taking things easy. There was but one hope of cure—to go the way you thought right, and leave such people to get reconciled to it as they could. Explanation and reasoning!—he was ashamed of having tried them. The people had treated him like a child.

So he crossed the hills next morning, and rode ten miles, to the nearest town, where he engaged a marble-mason to come over and remove the tablet. But Sunday intervened, and as it chanced, his father was ill, and he had to stand in his place under the tablet in the chancel. And all at once, while there, there flashed into his mind one, at any rate, of the words which Roger the mason had spoken—quite an unreasonable word, be it granted, but reason, even in the most reasoning men, is not always a match for feeling, and Geronimo was suddenly unnerved. The Gospel for the day contained the brief, pathetic history of the widow of Nain; and crossed as all the incidents were,—for *he* was the only son of a yet living father, and it was the mother who was dead—every word seemed to touch his case, and he had a sensation as if the Maria Maddalena of his childhood was looking down over his head from the tablet he was preparing to remove. He actually shuddered. What if his father were about to die too?

Yet, what really overwhelmed him, little as he knew it, was the contrast which made itself felt between the hardness of his own attempted system and the sympathy which breathed out of the Gospel page. The Saviour had driven the money-changers from the temple, it is true, with the hand of indignant power; but there was no question of the world's vile desecrating traffic

in that still marble monument on the wall. Geronimo did not think it all out then, nor till long afterwards, but in steeling himself to set a point of—let it be granted—ecclesiastical propriety above the much weightier matter of human sympathy, and a regard for moral results on others, he had followed the Pharisees of old, rather than Him who imposed none but necessary burdens on the tremulous human mind.

Nevertheless his resolution had received a shock, and he was up betimes next morning to meet the marble-mason on his way. He had altered his intentions, he told him, with respect to the tablet, but there was another little matter of restoration in the church which he wished him to undertake. And now Geronimo breathed freely again, and met his father at breakfast with an easy mind. He therefore spoke quite cheerfully of the proposed restoration of a Knight Templar's tomb, which had long been in disorder, and alluded to the marble-mason from the town as being there.

A cry from his father interrupted him.

"Geronimo!—that marble-mason!—have you really had the heart to—" Here breath failed the old man, and he turned very pale.

"No, no!" cried Geronimo, passionately, for he knew what was meant.

"It is well," murmured the father. "I gave you leave, I know; but, Geronimo, I doubt if I could have borne it. One gets weaker as one gets older; and, with weak people as with ignorant ones, the grasshopper is sometimes a burden."

If Geronimo could but have recollected this! But he had seen so little of life and the world himself, that he could scarcely help being one-sided and narrow-minded; and as he would not avail himself of his father's wider knowledge, what remained but to make mistakes?

So, priding himself on an inflexible firmness in matters of "principle," however small, he confounded together things indifferent and important; did even wise ones foolishly; and

attempted others which were neither wise, nor worth a hundredth part of the offence they created.

"We are to 'be hated of all men for His name's sake,'" quoted he, in justification of the course he was pursuing.

"His name's sake!" I dare not record the trivialities he dignified upon that sacred ground.

But on one or two points the father interfered authoritatively, and then domestic disagreement arose. Now Geronimo had thought scorn of Roger the mason for not yielding to his better knowledge and authoritative position, as a matter of course. Yet here, where to the counsellor was added father as well as priest, and to the knowledge of the schools the broader experiences of a long and varied life, it came quite natural to this mere lad by comparison, to think, and betray the thought, that he knew a thousand times the better of the two. Verily, if a little of the old heathen respect for the wisdom of grey hairs had been added to his theological dogmas, Geronimo's Christianity would not have suffered.

"And a man's foes shall be they of his own household," murmured the old man to himself in the bitterness of his heart, as he wondered whether it would not soon be his duty to send this his only son from his side. For how could he be justified in letting the clouds of miserable parties and party feelings gather into a storm?

But now Geronimo, too, awoke to the fact that such a storm threatened. The gossip spread on every side that father and son did not always agree, and the flock were not likely to be unanimous. The wicked natural man loves contest; the weak natural man loves excitement. An expression of partizanship to himself, coupled with disrespect for his father, awoke Geronimo to a sense of his position, if it did not explain his mistake. And on looking further round, his tender conscience was grieved. The old confidence was broken up, the old love was failing—whether with or without a reason was not the question now. What could be the cause? What was the remedy?

Perhaps he had been too busy with his plans and changes to have made himself as much a personal friend as was desirable. He redoubled his exertions and visits, endeavoured to conciliate on all sides; but, somehow, something was wanting. If from long habit a good many still came out to follow himself and his father to church, they did so at a greater and greater distance. Only a few came up now to claim the friendly greeting, which he remembered as part of the Sunday's intercourse in the days of his childhood. Geronimo was puzzled.

Yet, if the kaleidoscope had but brought round, for contemplation, that crystal from the wisdom of St. Paul, "Destroy not him with thy meat for whom Christ died," he would have known the cause of estrangement, and how to apply a cure. As it was, an idea at once bright and kind struck him, and he lost no time in carrying it out with zeal.

Geronimo was musical—he had been so from childhood upwards—had introduced better music as well as greater beauty into the venerable old church; and for both these things the people were grateful, as they ought to be.

He would make use of this happily universal feeling; he would give a treat to high and low—would have a festival; they should keep holiday with singing and gladness and feasting; and the day should be his father's birthday. He would dispel the dreadful and mischievous idea that the house to which all the parish looked for example, was divided against itself!

Never was a happier thought struck out! It furnished occupation for hearts, and minds, and hands; and the old folks, who could do nothing but talk, had a harmless subject of conversation. "Eh dear, then, Mr. Geronimo and his father were as friendly as ever! It had all been a mistake about their not agreeing. Eh, how pleased the old gentleman looked, to be sure, when he called, here and there, to ask them if they were going to get ready! Why, he was helping everybody to trim themselves up in their best for the grand supper there was to be

at the end. And on the old gentleman's birthday, and all! It *was* something to think of! They *were* glad!"

And so they were; but so also, only more deeply so, were father and son, for they felt reunited.

And now the time drew near, and only one small contradiction had arisen. The organ was not so perfectly in tune as to please Geronimo's delicate ear; and when, nearly at the last moment, he wrote over for the one organ-builder of the distant town, he found, to his dismay, that the man was absent, and would be so till the day after the festival.

The evil was slight, and the father entreated Geronimo to be satisfied: so few would discover the imperfection. But Geronimo could not rest; his passionate love of order was offended; and it must be owned that the instinct is a good one. "In the beginning," the will of God brought an organized world out of elemental confusion. In the end, we hope He will bring harmony into the discordant world of spirits. And in the present life men may, each one in his degree, labour to the same good end. It is both their privilege and their duty to do so. Lawyers, physicians, statesmen, men of science, and, above all, divines, undertake to do it by their very professions. Entangled claims, diseased bodies, disturbed nations, complicated physical laws and distressed souls, all need the peace that comes with being ordered aright. In Geronimo, the instinct was almost a passion; but of the judicious application of means to the blessed end, he did not know a great deal more than of how to bring the organ of the village church into the desired perfection of tune.

Nevertheless, he knew something of that, for he had been present when the organ-builder had tuned the instrument before, had observed the process of widening or narrowing the mouths of the pipes in order to change their tone, and had since ventured on correcting a defective note or two himself. What was to hinder him from tuning the whole of them now, if he could but ascertain the order in which the guiding scale

of notes was made perfect? To bring all the rest into unison with that, would be no difficulty, for he could perfectly trust his ear. The difficulty was, to get at the first principles of the matter. The youth who played the organ when Geronimo's duties precluded his assistance, knew nothing of the subject.

But Geronimo would not be baffled. The day before the festival he crossed the hills to the town, and called at a musical-instrument maker's shop. Could they give him, he asked, the succession of notes by which organs were tuned?

Mr. Somebody asked Mr. Somebody-else, and there was a reference to an authority through a door. The shopman, who was left behind, eyed Geronimo askance. Was he in their line of business? he wondered. Presently the other man returned, and presented him with a bit of music-paper, on which twenty notes were marked down.

"These are the notes, sir," said he, rather coolly, as if he, too, half suspected a rival; "the same as for a pianoforte—as, of course, you know," he added, with a half-inquiring look.

Geronimo disliked familiarity, and gave a half-impatient nod.

"Mr. — desired me to say, with his compliments, sir," continued the messenger, "he supposed you're aware it's a difficult business, organ-tuning, to anyone that hasn't practised it."

"Has *your* master practised it?" inquired Geronimo, with a new hope.

"Oh, no, sir," replied the man, who himself did duty as master on the other side of the door; "we're pianoforte tuners only, sir."

"What does the fool mean?" thought Geronimo, as he walked away. "A difficult business it may be to a man without an ear, but easy enough otherwise, with the clue in his hand. Thank Heaven, there is the comfort of certainty in dealing with material things! Fixed laws, and fixed results! Not that everlasting trimming and yielding, which leave every work one undertakes imperfect at last!"

As Geronimo mused thus, and read over the clearly-defined system by which his organ was to be brought into that harmonious order which we call "*being in tune*," he almost felt that an organ-builder's business was a more satisfactory one than a clergyman's.

There was still the little brass cone, used for widening or contracting the pipes, to be obtained ; but this he asked for at the organ-builder's establishment—no remark passing there on what it was wanted for ; and then Geronimo hurried home.

And now it will be understood what took the young curate to the church so early, on the morning of that autumn festival-day. He had begun, but not nearly completed, the tuning of the organ the evening before, having gone to it as soon as he could make an excuse to leave his father again ; for the bold feat was to be kept secret till its successful accomplishment proved how wisely it had been undertaken. And now it must be finished before breakfast ; for the decorations were to be brought in afterwards, and he himself had a thousand other things to do.

For two hours and upwards, therefore, did he persevere in his anxious work ; his greatest trouble being the special care required in the mechanical part, inasmuch as a hasty or too heavy insertion of the cone into the mouths of the pipes was liable to split the metal and do mischief. But Geronimo kept every faculty on the full stretch of attention, and his perfect ear made the bringing of the notes into correct harmony a matter of no trouble at all, but, on the contrary, of the keenest pleasure. And the instrument was more glaringly out of order than he had supposed. His father had fancied it was only a little out of tune, and he himself had not thought the disorder very great. But now that he tested it by the scale, almost every note was wrong, and must be altered. A few of the octaves harmonized together, it is true ; but all the fifths were either too flat or too sharp. That not one should have remained perfect by accident, as several of the octaves had done, puzzled him not a little ; but the fact of their all being imperfect, more

or less, was undeniable. What a blessing he had it in his power to remedy the evil!

Yes; for two hours and upwards did the work go on; the occasional drone of the pipes vibrating drearily through the aisles, and almost causing little Roger to fall asleep at his post of blower. At last, however, every octave had been gone through, had been brought into perfect unison with the perfected scale of the twenty notes, and Geronimo's labours were over!

"Roger," cried he, to the child, whose blowing efforts were perceptibly failing.

"Yes, sir!"

"Blow steadily and strongly now, for ten minutes more, and you shall go home to breakfast. Fill the bellows, there's a good lad."

Roger worked his arms vigorously, and the bellows were soon full.

"It's all right now, please sir," said he.

Geronimo had his eyes on a piece of music open on the desk before him. It was Haydn's Mass, in five flats—his dream of beauty among all the classical music of the world. As Roger spoke, the young curate bent forward, and struck down the full magnificent chords of the key.

But almost as he struck them, he uttered a cry, which it was well the louder organ sounds drowned, or Roger would have thought Geronimo mad—a cry of both despair and physical distress. As it was, something startled the lad, and he let go the blowing handle with a jerk. It ran up at once, and the organ notes died out in a mournful squeal.

As to Geronimo, it would be difficult to describe what he did. He was off the stool in an instant, shouting to Roger to know if he had broken the bellows; then back again to retouch the expiring notes, and see if he had been under a delusion, or if he had struck the instrument at random. But no, no, no! Then how—by what miracle—could he account for the fact

that his touch upon that chord had filled the air with dissonant vibrations—horrible to the most untutored ear, but to his refined one absolutely insufferable? Chord indeed! the very word was a mockery; what he had struck was a clash of discords.

Human nature itself had never puzzled Geronimo half as much!

After the first agony was over, he examined the matter with all the calmness and care he could command—made Roger blow again—tried other chords in succession—but in all cases with the same result, in a greater or less degree. Once more, then, he got out the tuning-scale—once more ran over the guiding twenty notes: there was not a single flaw, not one; not a varying vibration could be heard; and all the others were in unison with those. And then again he struck a chord, and the chord was no chord at all. He next examined the pipes: perhaps he had cracked all their mouths with his cone. But no, there was not a split in any one of them; he had been far too careful for that. And now time was getting on, and Roger was half starved. A knocking had already been heard at one of the doors. The decorators must be let in, and he must go home to his breakfast and his father. Geronimo's face, as he locked up the organ and put the keys in his pocket, looked ten years older than it had done before he began his work. He gave Roger half a crown, as a treat for the day, and hastened home.

It is difficult to reckon on the conduct of any one under the trial of having made a great mistake. Some people fight meanly to get out of a little fault, as if self-conceit was the leading principle of their lives, but humble themselves nobly under a great one; and this was the case with Geronimo. He went at once to his father, and told him all he had done, blaming himself more bitterly than his father would allow he deserved. But he did more than that; he stepped into many houses that morning, both of farmers and shopkeepers, and told

them they must forgive him for being the cause of what he feared would be a great disappointment. He had wanted to make the organ better, and he had, unfortunately, done something to it which had made it worse; and as he could not find out what was amiss, it couldn't be remedied. He would get the choir to make amends by singing their very best, and he would help them all he could himself. He begged that the blunder might not be allowed to spoil the pleasure of the day.

Unaccountable human race! we ought indeed to be patient, one with the other! Geronimo had not received so many smiles in all the time he had been curate, as now, when he was carrying round the painful message of his own defeat.

It was wonderful! Kind words were on every lip; not a reproach was heard.—It had been so good of Mr. Geronimo to try.—They were so sure it couldn't have been his fault, but something that had gone wrong of itself.—Any how, they didn't mind at all, and hoped he wouldn't trouble himself.—They should hear him sing all the plainer for there being no music besides; and, as for that piece the old Master had talked about so much, they hoped he'd be so good as to play it to them some other day.—They begged *he* wouldn't mind—that was all!

Geronimo felt crowned with roses, for his frankness, if not for the error he had committed; and service, feast, and festival, were kept with unclouded comfort, bringing a promise of further comfort in store—a better understanding of what was meant on all sides.

And now for the explanation. Neither father nor son could unravel the mystery. The only guess even that they could make was, that the man at the music-shop might have given them a wrong scale to work by. It was not a bad idea, and it served to keep them quiet till the organ-builder, whom they had sent for at once, came over. He was an odd, sententious old man, with a good deal of dry humour. So when he got

into the church, and touched the fatal organ, he first chuckled and then laughed outright.

Were the bellows out of order? Were the pipes injured? Was the scale incorrect? Was the tuning imperfect? Geronimo's questions fell thick and fast.

"Nothing of the sort, young gentleman," said the organ-builder to every suggestion. "There's only one thing the matter—but it's everything—the tuning's *too perfect by half!*"

Both Geronimo and his father stared, to the organ-builder's great delight.

"You don't seem to have heard of this before gentlemen," observed he; "but it's a fact, nevertheless. The scale's all right; the system's perfect; but if you stick too close to it, it sets you wrong. The organ won't bear it, that's the fact."

"Not bear being put into perfect tune?" asked Geronimo, really astonished. "How is that possible?"

"It's an imperfect instrument, sir," answered the organ-builder; "and that being the case, you have to make the best you can of it, and not expect to get it perfect, for that's not possible."

Here he took up the scale paper, and went on to explain that most of the fifths must be left somewhat flat, and the few others made somewhat sharp; the octaves alone being tuned in perfect unison. And this was the only plan, he assured them, of getting a generally harmonious whole—"not perfect, I grant, even then," added he, "but pretty fair for this present life, gentlemen, you see."

Geronimo listened in silence. A system of expediency in the material world, and in music especially, seemed to him monstrous. He sat silently by, too, while the organ-builder made his preparations for repairing the mischief that had been done. His father slipt away, as silent as himself, though possibly he made his own reflections before he went.

But Geronimo sat silently on, till at last the organ-builder began to tune the fifths, leaving each one flat in succession;

and then he could contain himself no longer. He got up, but only to sit down again, and then rose once more.

"This is most trying!" he exclaimed. "As unsatisfactory to the mind as the ear! To have a perfect system to go by" (here he pointed to the scale of twenty notes), "and not be allowed to carry it perfectly out, though ear and heart rebel against the disorder! To have an evil under your very hand to be remedied, and be obliged to suffer it still. I call this dreadful!"

The organ-builder stopped his work, to listen and reply:—

"It's not very pleasant, I admit," said he, "but there's one thing's worse—to find you've worked so hard for the system, that you've missed the end it was made for."

"A perfect system ought to work out a perfect end," murmured Geronimo.

But the organ-builder shook his head. "Not if the instrument isn't perfect too," persisted he; "there's sure to be a cross somewhere."

Drone went another pipe, another imperfect fifth was tuned, and the organ-builder made another pause. He was a very sententious man, and liked to explain all round his subject.

"It's the same all through life," observed he; "the best rules even,—short of Gospel rules, of course,—mustn't be pressed too close; neither man nor organ can bear it. If we were all up in heaven it might be different."

In spite of himself Geronimo smiled, and the smile did him good. "What a choice of evils!" said he.

"Can't be otherwise," remarked his companion, "so long as things are all imperfect together—men and organs, and perhaps even rules too, sometimes."

Geronimo shook his head, but the organ-builder did not notice it, and went back to his tuning as cheerful as if no such thing as a sad necessity existed in the world. And Geronimo went on listening to the unsatisfactory sounds, musing the while thereupon.

. . . Irregularity—inconsistency—contradictions even,—were as rife then in the material world as in the spiritual:—must be borne with—allowed for—made the best of—in the one case as in the other, in order to compass the great object at last. The organ-builder's business was not so much more satisfactory than a clergyman's, after all! . . .

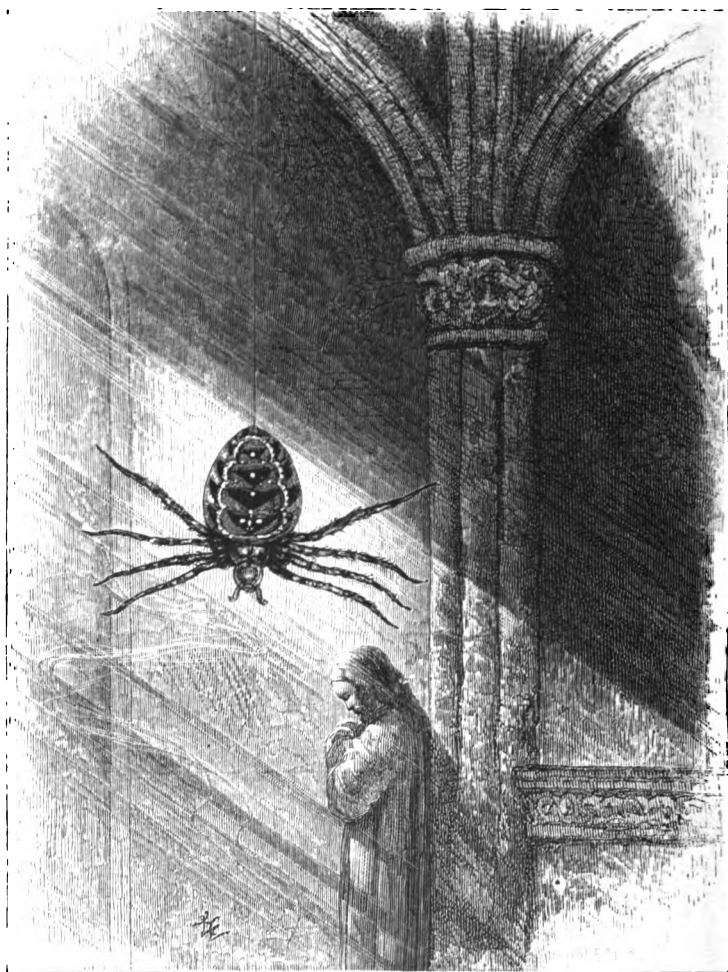
“ Now, sir, you may play Hadyn's Mass in five flats for as long as you please,” observed the old man, as he concluded the tuning; striking down the full chord of the key in proof of the fact: “ The organ goes sweetly enough now.”

And so it did—“ sweetly enough,” if not as perfectly as Geronimo could have desired; and though the comparatively harmonious end had been gained at the sacrifice of some theoretical correctness; but he had had his lesson, and must henceforth be contented with something short of his ideal.

“ That type of Perfect in his mind,
In Nature can he nowhere find.”

Nowhere in the lower nature, at least; and for the full development of the higher, he must wait in patience. But patience is the philosophy of experience: and even Geronimo attained it at last.





COBWEEBS.



COBWEBS.

"I cannot make this matter plain,
But I would shoot, howe'er in vain,
A random arrow from the brain."

TENNYSON.

TWINETTE the Spider was young, hungry, and industrious. "Weave yourself a web, my dear," said her mother, "as you know how without teaching, and catch flies for yourself; only don't weave near me in the corner here. I am old, and stay in the corners; but you are young, and needn't. Besides, you would be in my way. Scramble along the rafters to a little distance off, and spin. But mind! just see there's nothing there—below you I mean—before you begin. You won't catch anything to eat, if there isn't empty space about you for the flies to fly in."

Twinette was dutiful, and obeyed. She scrambled along the woodwork of the groined roof of the church—for it was there her mother lived—till she had gone what she thought might fairly be called a little distance off, and then she stopped to look round, which, considering she had eight eyes to do it with, was not difficult. But she was not so sure of what there might be below.

"I wonder whether mother would say there was nothing

here—below me, I mean—but empty space for flies to fly in?” said she.

But she might have stood wondering there for ever. So she went back to her mother, and asked what she thought.

“Oh dear, oh dear!” said her mother, “how can I think about what I don’t see? There usen’t to be anything there in my young days, I’m sure. But everybody must find out things for themselves. Let yourself down by the family rope, as you know how, without teaching, and see for yourself if there’s anything there or not.”

Twinette was a very intelligent young spider, quite worthy of the age she was born in; so she thanked her mother for her advice, and was just starting afresh, when another thought struck her. “How shall I know if there’s anything there when I get there?” asked she.

“Dear me, if there’s anything there, how can you help seeing it?” cried the mother, rather teased by her daughter’s inquiring spirit, “you with at least eight eyes in your head!”

“Thank you. Now I quite understand,” said Twinette; and scuttling back to the end of the rafter, she began to prepare the family rope.

It was the most exquisite thing in the world—so fine, you could scarcely see it; so elastic, it could be blown about without breaking; such a perfect grey that it looked white against black things, and black against white; so manageable that Twinette could both make it, and slide down by it at once; and when she wished to get back, could slip up by it, and roll it up at the same time!

It was a wonderful rope for anybody to make without teaching. But Twinette was not conceited. Rope-making came as natural to her as eating and fighting do to intelligent little boys, so she thought no more about it than we do of chewing our food.

How she did it is another question, and one not easily answered, however intelligent we may be. Thus much may

be hinted :—Out of four little spinning machines near the tail came four little threads, and the rope was a four-twist of these. But as each separate thread was itself a many-twist of a great many others, still finer, I do not pretend to tell the number of strands (as rope-threads are called) in Twinette's family rope. Enough, that as she made it now, it has been made from generation to generation, and there seems to be no immediate prospect of a change.

The plan was for the spinner to glue the ends to the rafter, and then start off. Then, out came the threads from the spinning machines, and twist went the rope; and the further the spinner travelled, the longer the rope became.

And Twinette made ready accordingly, and turning on her back, let herself fairly off.

The glued ends held fast, the four strands twined closely together, and down went the family rope, with Twinette at the end, guiding it. Down into the middle of the chancel, where there were carved oaken screens on three sides, and carved oaken seats below, with carved oaken figures at each end of each.

Twinette was about halfway down to the stone-flagged floor, when she shut up the spinning machines, and stopped to rest and look round. Then, balancing herself at the end of her rope, with her legs crumpled up round her, she made her remarks.

"This is charming!" cried she. "One had need to travel and see the world. And all's so nice in the middle here. Nice empty space for the flies to fly about in; and a very pleasant time they must have of it! Dear me, how hungry I feel—I must go back and weave at once."

But just as she was preparing to roll up the rope and be off, a ray of sunshine, streaming through one of the chancel windows, struck in a direct line upon her suspended body, quite startling her with the dazzle of its brightness. Everything seemed in a blaze all round her, and she turned round and round in terror.

"Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear!" cried she, for she didn't know what to say, and still couldn't help calling out. Then, making a great effort, she gave one hearty spring, and, blinded though she was, shot up to the groined roof, as fast as spider could go, rolling the rope into a ball as she went. After which she stopped to complain.

But it is dull work complaining to oneself, so she soon ran back to her mother in the corner.

"Back again so soon, my dear?" asked the old lady, not over-pleased at the fresh disturbance.

"Back again at all is the wonder," whimpered Twinette. "There's something down there, after all, besides empty space."

"Why, what did you see?" asked her mother.

"Nothing; that was just it," answered Twinette. "I could see nothing for dazzle and blaze; but I did see dazzle and blaze."

"Young people of the present day are very troublesome with their observations," remarked the mother; "however, if one rule will not do, here is another. Did dazzle and blaze shove you out of your place, my dear?"

Twinette said, "Certainly not—she had come away of herself."

"Then how could they be anything?" asked her mother. "Two things could not be in one place at the same time. Let Twinette try to get into her place, while she was there herself, and see if she could."

Twinette did not try, because she knew she couldn't, but she sat very silent, wondering what dazzle and blaze could be, if they were nothing at all! a puzzle which might have lasted her for ever. Fortunately her mother interrupted her, by advising her to go and get something to do. She really couldn't afford to feed her out of *her* web any longer, she said.

"If dazzle and blaze kill me, you'll be sorry, mother," said Twinette, in a pet.

"Nonsense, about dazzle and blaze," cried the old spider, now thoroughly roused. "I dare say they're only a little more light than usual. There's more or less light up here in the corners even, at times. You talk nonsense, my dear."

So Twinette scuttled off in silence; for she dared not ask what light was, though she wanted to know.

But she felt too cross to begin to spin. She preferred a search after truth to her dinner, which showed she was no commonplace spider. So she resolved to go down below in another place and see if she could find a really empty space; and accordingly prepared the family rope.

When she came down, it was about half a foot further east in the chancel, and a very prosperous journey she made. "Come! all's safe so far," said she, her good humour returning. "I do believe I've found nothing at last. How jolly it is!" As she spoke, she hung dangling at the end of her rope, back downwards, her legs tucked up round her as before, in perfect enjoyment, when, suddenly, the south door of the church was thrown open, and a strong gust set in. It was a windy evening, and the draught that poured into the chancel blew the family rope, with Twinette at the end of it, backwards and forwards through the air, till she turned quite giddy.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" cried she, puffing, "What shall I do! How could they say there was nothing here—oh dear!—but empty space for flies—oh dear—to fly in?" But at last, in despair, she made an effort of resistance, and, in the very teeth of the wind, succeeded in coiling up the family rope, and so got back to the rafters.

It was a piece of rare good fortune for her that a lazy, half-alive fly happened to be creeping along it just at the moment. As she landed from her air-dive she pounced on the stroller, killed him, and sucked his juices before he knew where he was, as people say. Then, throwing down his carcass, she scrambled back to her mother, and told her what she thought, though not in plain words. For what she thought was that the old lady

didn't know what she was saying, when she talked about empty space with nothing in it.

"Dazzle and blaze were nothing," cried she at last, "though they blinded me because they and I were in one place together, which couldn't be if they'd been anything; and now this is nothing, though it blows me out of my place twenty times in a minute, because I can't see it. What's the use of rules one can't go by, mother? I don't believe you know a quarter of what's down below there."

The old spider's head turned as giddy with Twinette's arguments as Twinette's had done while swinging in the wind.

"I don't see what it can matter what's there," whimpered she, "if there's room for flies to fly about in. I wish you'd go back and spin."

"That's another part of the question," remarked Twinette, in answer to the first half of her mother's sentence. In answer to the second she scuttled back to the rafter, intending to be obedient and spin. But she dawdled and thought, and thought and dawdled, till the day was nearly over.

"I will take one more turn down below," said she to herself at last, "and look round me again."

And so she did, but went further down than before; then stopped to rest as usual. Presently, as she hung dangling in the air by her line, she grew venturesome. "I will sift the matter to the bottom," thought she. "I will see how far empty space goes." So saying she re-opened her spinning-machines and started afresh.

It was a wonderful rope, certainly, or it would not have gone on to such a length without breaking. In a few seconds Twinette was on the cold stone pavement. But she didn't like the feel of it at all, so took to running as fast as she could go, and luckily met with a step of woodwork on one side. Up this she hurried at once, and crept into a corner close by, where she stopped to take breath. "One doesn't know what

to expect in such queer outlandish places," observed she; "when I've rested I'll go back, but I must wait till I can see a little better."

Seeing a little better was out of the question, however, for night was coming on, and when, weary of waiting, she stepped out of her hiding place to look round, the whole church was in darkness.

Now it is one thing to be snug in bed when it is dark, and another to be a long way from home and have lost your way, and not know what may happen to you next minute. Twinette had often been in the dark corner with her mother, and thought nothing of it. Now she shook all over with fright, and wondered what dreadful thing darkness could be.

Then she thought of her mother's rules, and felt quite angry.

"I can't see anything and I don't feel anything," murmured she, "and yet here's something that frightens me out of my wits."

At last her very fright made her bold. She felt about for the family rope; it was there safe and sound, and she made a spring. Roll went the rope, and up went its owner; higher, higher, higher, through the dark night air; seeing nothing, hearing nothing, feeling nothing but the desperate fear within. By the time she touched the rafter, she was half-exhausted; and as soon as she was safely landed upon it, she fell asleep.

It must have been late next morning when she woke, for the sound of organ music was pealing through the church, and the air vibrations swept pleasantly over her frame; rising and falling like gusts of night, swelling and sinking like waves of the sea, gathering and dispersing like vapours of the sky.

She went down by the family rope to observe, but nothing was to be seen to account for her sensations. Fresh ones, however, stole round her, as she hung suspended, for it was a harvest-festival, and large white lilies were grouped with evergreens round the slender pillars of the screens, and filled the

air with their powerful odour. Still, nothing disturbed her from her place. Sunshine streamed in through the windows—she even felt it warm on her body—but it interfered with nothing else; and, meanwhile, in such sort as spiders hear, she heard music and prayer:—whether as music and prayer come to us, or as deaf men enjoy sound by touch, let those say who can! A door opened, and a breeze caught her rope; but still she held fast. So music and prayer and sunshine and breeze and scent were all there together; and Twinette was among them, and saw flies flying about overhead.

This was enough; she went back to the rafter, chose a home, and began to spin. Before evening, her web was completed, and her first prey caught and feasted on. Then she cleared the remains out of her chamber, and sat down in state to think; for Twinette was now a philosopher. It came to her while she was spinning her web. As she crossed and twisted the threads, her ideas grew clearer and clearer, or she fancied so, which did almost as well. Each line she fastened brought its own reflection; and this was the way they went on:—

“Empty space is an old wife’s tale”—she fixed that very tight. “Sight and touch are very imperfect guides”—this crossed the other at an angle. “Two or three things can easily be in one place at the very same time”—this seemed very loose till she tightened it by a second. “Sunshine and wind and scent and sound don’t drive each other out of their places”—that held firm. “When one has sensations there is something to cause them, whether one sees it, or feels it, or finds it out, or not”—this was a wonderful thread, it went right round the web and was fastened down in several places. “Light and darkness, and sunshine and wind, and sound and sensation, and fright and pleasure, don’t keep away flies”—the little interlacing threads looked quite pretty as she placed them. “How many things I know of that I don’t know much about”—the web got thicker every minute. “And perhaps there may be

ever so many more beyond—ever so many more—ever so many more—beyond.” Those were her very last words. She kept repeating them till she finished her web; and when she sat up in state, after supper, to think, she began to repeat them again; for she could think of nothing better or wiser to say. But this was no wonder, for all her thoughts put together made nothing but a cobweb, after all!

And when the Turk’s-head broom swept it, with others, from the roof, Twinette was no longer in the little chamber below. She had died and bequeathed her cobweb-wisdom to another generation. But as it was only cobweb-wisdom, spiders remain spiders still, and still weave their webs in the roofs of churches without fathoming the mystery of unseen presences below.







BIRDS IN THE NEST.



BIRDS IN THE NEST.

"Safe in the hand of one disposing pow'r,
Or in the natal, or the mortal hour,
All Nature is but art, unknown to thee;
All chance, direction, which thou canst not see."

POPE'S *Essay on Man*.

ONCE upon a time there was in a wood a nest which held eight of the dearest little eggs a hen-mother ever looked upon with joy. At least this particular hen-mother thought so, and her mate rather agreed with her when they talked the matter over together. And his opinion had weight, for in his flights he sometimes saw other eggs, and would tell her about them on his return. But what could they be to her own? Nothing could be better than what was perfect, and her own were perfect in her eyes. What a fine shape they had! How beautifully rounded! How soft their tint! How tasteful the arrangement of spots! All others must needs be too light or too dark, or too something or other, to suit her particular taste. The sea-gull, who ate snails in the garden, boasted of his family egg as twenty times larger and twenty times more beautiful. "But if it *be* more beautiful, what can that matter to us," said the hen-mother, in conclusion, "when ours are perfect in our eyes, and we are so very happy?"

"And shall be so much happier yet," pursued her mate, who as a travelled bird, had had experience, and knew what was in store; "when the little ones awake to a life and enjoyment of their own, and can feed and sing, and know and love us both."

"Ah, to be sure, to be sure, that will be rapture, indeed," cried the hen-mother. "Thank you so much for telling me! How silly I was, thinking I was as happy as I could possibly be! Of course I shall be happier by-and-bye; and how *very* happy that will be, for I am happy enough now. I wish the day were come!"

Yet she was very happy; but most so when she forgot she was to be happier still.

And by-and-bye the time came; and when the little ones were all hatched, and could peer about and see their father bringing food, and open their mouths and swallow it very fast, and cry for more,—

"Now then, at last the happiness is perfect," said the hen-mother; "I have nothing further to wish for."

And she watched them being fed and satisfied, and never felt hungry herself, till they had had plenty and were at ease.

"Eight darlings in one nest! What a sight to fill one's heart! There may be trouble enough, it's true, and very little room to rest; but one's own eight beautiful creatures round one, under one's wing, all chirping and alive—this is perfection of happiness, indeed!"

"You cannot say so just yet," sang the mate; but he did not tell her this quite at first. He waited for a soft evening in early summer before he piped about what was in store.

"You cannot say so just yet. Our darlings are very sweet, but they are poor helpless things at present. Wait till they have grown more feathers, have learnt to take care of themselves, and fly and sing. They cannot be perfect, nor can your happiness be perfect, till then. Some of our neighbours are beforehand with us. There were fine young birds among

the boughs yesterday, twitting our youngsters in their songs with being behindhand altogether.

"They will not have to twit long, I suppose," exclaimed the hen-mother rather angrily. "Of course you will bring ours forward as fast as you can. Of course they must not be behind their neighbours. Of course they must learn to take care of themselves, and fly and sing like the rest. Dear, dear! how silly I was! But thank you so much for telling me. It's very well to be easily pleased, and the poor helpless things are very sweet, as you say; but of course it will be a much grander thing when they have grown to be fine young birds like those others; able to take care of themselves and to twit their neighbours who can't. And of course I shall be as happy again. I wish the time were come."

And it did come; but there was a great deal of trouble to be taken first. The little ones had to be nursed and fed till their feathers had grown, and then they had to be trained, by slow degrees and with much care, to use their young wings in flight. Now the hen-mother had left her mate no rest till he began to teach; for, first, she was jealous for her children's credit; and secondly, she wanted to feel what it was to be as happy as it was possible to be. Happy enough she was, but for this wish.

But alas! for the trouble and fear that came over her when the teaching really began. The eight darlings must come out of their nest, from under her wing; she could help them no longer—they could scarcely help themselves. Yet they must spread the feeble pinion, and strain the unpractised muscle, and run a risk of failure and even life, to insure success.

Oh, poor hen-mother, what a trying change was this, though brought about by her own especial desire! No wonder that, while the teaching was going on, she would sit and shake with fright, and wish all manner of foolish things: that they were back in the nest, of course; but far more than that—even that they were back in the old baby days again, in the egg-shells of their first existence, unconscious of life and of them. "They

were all under my wing then, at any rate," said she; "my own dear little ones with me, and I with them: what more could I want?"

And, oh dear, when the youngsters were safe in the nest once more at night, how she used to gather them under her wings with joy!

"I am getting to like night better than day," said she at last to her mate, "for then my birds are in the nest again. You are training them very cleverly, I know, and I was the first to want them to be clever like other young birds, and they are getting cleverer day by day, I dare say, so I ought to be happier; but the happiness is not as pleasant as it was. How can it be, when they are away so much, and the empty nest stares me in the face? The risks are so many too, till they can really fly well, and I tremble with fear. But all is right at night, when you all come back and sing. Yes, if it wasn't for thinking of the morrow, the happiness would be perfect indeed then: if it were always evening, I mean, and they and you were always here."

"It is natural you should feel as you do," replied the mate; "but you mistake the cause. If you are not quite happy yet, it is merely because things are not quite perfect, that is all. When the young ones can fly really well, for instance, there will no longer be any risk; and when they can sing better still, our music will be pleasanter than ever; and when they are able and independent, all our cares and anxieties will be at an end. Wait a little longer, and you will be happy indeed."

The hen-mother sighed. "I suppose you must be right," said she; "I will wait. But if I could sing myself, I would sing a mother's song about the birds in the nest. It may not have been perfection, but it was a very happy time."

So she waited and did her best to be pleased. But for longer and longer intervals the empty nest stared her in the face, and she thought many things she did not dare to say—even the old foolish wish that they were all in their egg-shells again.

Still, every evening, when they came back and perched in the boughs, if not in the nest, and the singing grew sweeter and sweeter, she cheered up and rejoiced once more.

And now at last the nestlings were full-grown birds, and could fly and sing as well as their parents. Perfection had come; they were independent; nobody's young birds could twit them now. "But now, of course," said their father, "they must go out and seek their fortunes, as we did, and choose mates, and settle in life for themselves. You see the justice of this?"

The hen-mother, to whom he was speaking, answered "Yes;" but her heart was half broken. And when he added, "This is the real perfection of happiness to parents," she made no answer at all.

"It ought to be, perhaps," thought she to herself, "but it isn't so with me. I wonder why?" She sat on the edge of the empty nest and wondered still; but she couldn't find out the secret there.

Then the young ones piped to her from the woods; and at last said she, "Things are altered, I see; I will go to them!" and the very thought comforted her as she flew away. And when she had found them, and watched them in the full enjoyment of their own young life—listened to them as they warbled merrily to each other among the trees, or sported with friends here and there, she began to understand the whole matter. She was rejoicing in their joy rather than in her own.

And time went on: and one day as she sat, so listening, on a branch in the centre of the wood, her mate by her side, said she, "It is all becoming quite clear, and I can see that you were right on the whole. This is nearer the perfection of happiness than anything else could be, but the quite perfect is not to be had. Still, this is nearest and best; whether sweetest or not, I scarcely know. But thank you for telling me! I was selfish before: wanted my own darlings to myself, under my own wing, in my own particular nest—safe, as I called it—foolish

that I was! Oh, narrow, narrow thought! As if one place was safer than another, when the sun looks down everywhere, streaming warmth and comfort upon all! I see things differently now. The wood is but a larger nest, and those that live in it but a larger family. I spread out my love a little wider, and behold my happiness spreads out too! Though each in turn, for a time, must form his own little circle of joy, the whole must form one larger circle together; and who knows where it is to end?"

She ceased, and then listened again, and truly the wood was ringing with melodies: her mate by her side; her children now here, now there with the dear ones they loved. The circle grew wider and wider as time went further on.

But by-and-bye, when age had crept over both, the mate had tender thoughts himself of old times, and tenderer still for her. She had not been wrong altogether, he whispered softly and kindly. It was not selfishness only that had filled her heart. He would sing her the song she used to wish she could have sung herself—a mother's song about the birds in the nest.

And it went to the hearts of both.

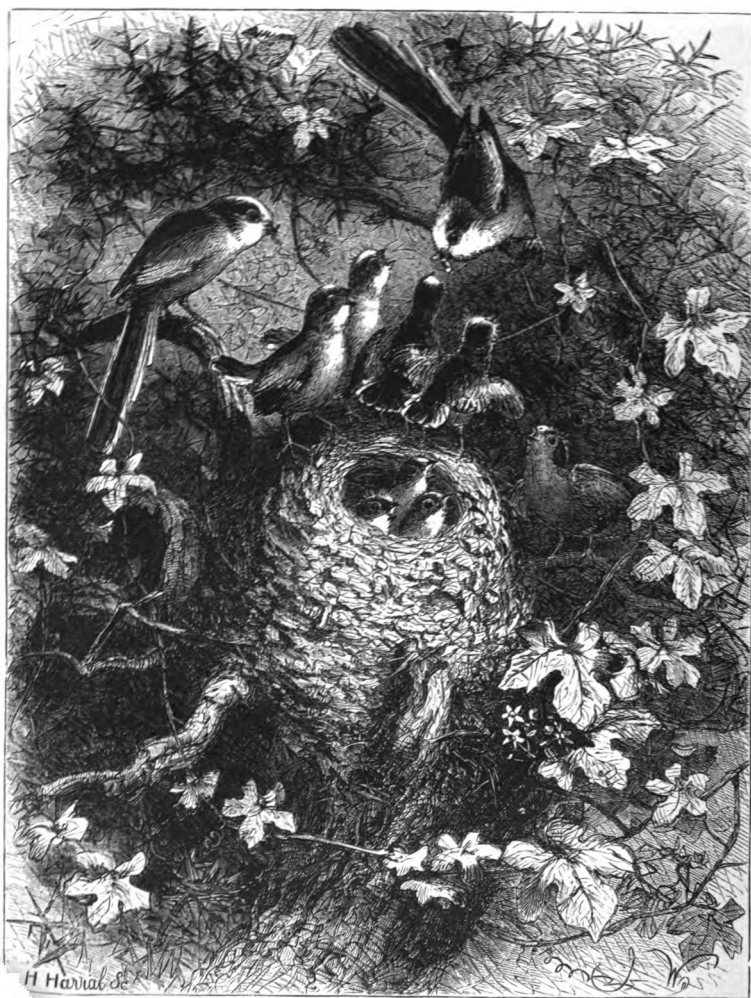
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Other mothers in other nests, lift up your souls, as the circle widens from your feet. "One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all," has all together now in the circle of His care; yea, even though a world, or the change we call death, may seem to divide them: and HE will bring His own together at last into one home—the "Father's House:"—one home, be the mansions never so many!



NOTES.





BIRDS IN THE NEST.



NOTES.

RED SNOW.

I.

THE Red Snow Plant, *Protococcus nivalis*,* (Agardh) is the simplest known form of vegetable life. It is a microscopic Alga, about one thousandth of an inch in diameter, but possessing such a wonderful power of reproduction, that it constantly spreads over miles of snow, in masses sufficiently thick to be visible at great distances, imparting to the mountain sides a beautiful rosy hue.

Captain Ross discovered it when sailing along the Arctic coast. He saw the cliffs of snow, for miles, painted red; landed to examine, and found the snow full of *Protococcus*.

But this was by no means the first time of its being observed. Dr. C. A. Agardh, who drew up a "Memoir on the Red Snow brought from the Polar Regions," tells us that "it is a very common appearance in all the Alpine countries of Europe," and that a naturalist named De Saussure was the first who noticed it, in the year 1760, on Mount Breven, in Switzerland.

An Italian scientific journal of 1818 described what it called a *fall* of rose-coloured snow on the Italian Alps, and the Apennines, in 1808, which in one night covered the whole country around Cadore, Belluno, and Feltri, to the depth of twenty centimetres; and another, "in the night between the 14th and 15th March, 1813, along the whole chain of the Apennines." But that these, and other similar cases, were really, as has been supposed by "many even learned

* Ag. Syst. Alg., p. 13.

individuals," falls of red snow from the sky, Professor Agardh denies. He describes it, on the contrary, as a vegetable growth, assisted into existence "by the vivifying power of light," when "the sun has dissolved the surface of the snow by its warmth."

Dr. Greville (from whose Scottish Cryptogamic Flora many of these details are gathered) is of opinion that "having become once established in the snow, it is possible that, by the intense cold of winter, the vegetating power may be suspended beneath the frozen surface, and thus, on the dissolution of the superincumbent snow, the *Protococcus*, numerous as the grains of sand on the sea-shore, may start into renewed life, and seem indeed to have descended from the clouds."

With respect to the colour of the *Protococcus nivalis*, it is to be observed that it varies very much in intensity, owing, as Agardh supposes, to the greater or less amount of light to which it is exposed; for he says that its red hue gradually changes to green, "as it occurs more or less secluded from the light in the fissures of the rock or under stones."

Certainly, some Swiss travellers, who have found the plant in great abundance on Mont Blanc and Monte Rosa, have yet not seen it producing the vivid hue described by Captain Ross and the Italian journals. Peculiar circumstances, therefore, both of light, and the precise amount of moisture on the surface of the snows, may be requisite to its being seen in all its possible beauty; a fact which may account for the supposed "falls of red snow" not having been oftener noticed.

In Scotland, *Protococcus nivalis* is found in abundance on the borders of the lakes of Lismore, spreading over the decayed reeds, leaves, &c. at the water's edge, but in greater perfection on the calcareous rocks within the reach of occasional inundation. . . . It is to be found, more or less, at all seasons of the year.

It is the *Lepraria hermesina*, found on white limestone rocks, of Baron Wrangel.

The concluding paragraph of Professor Agardh's Memoir is so beautiful that it well deserves to be added here. "If my views of this body, which may be denominated the *Flower of the Snow*, be correct, our admiration will only receive a new direction. If we cease to believe that Algæ or Infusoria descend in showers, we must admit that the snow of a whole mountain may be covered, in the course of a few days, by a red vegetation, strongly contrasted with its own white hue; we must admire the activity of that Power which is so universally diffused, filling the bosom of even the winter-snow with life and vegetation. It is generally known that the colours of plants become duller and paler in proportion as they are withdrawn

from the influence of light, and that the fields of the North boast of few bright hues, while the Tropics abound with all the splendour of colour. Yet the North in its Alps approaches the source of light, and, by means of its snows, condenses the power of its beams, so as to produce the same effect as the warmest summer. Nature, in all her forms ever different, ever changing, is in one thing only the same, ever new and equally wonderful."

It in no way takes from the romance of the subject, that Dr. Harvey,* and some other botanists of the present day, consider "*Protococcus pluvialis*, found in shallow pools of rain-water, on the surface of rocks, in gutters of houses, &c., &c.," to be no more *specifically* different from *Protococcus nivalis*, than the matter of rain is from the matter of snow. It is rather difficult to find from being inconspicuous; but once obtained on either a leaf, a bit of stick, or a stone, it can be easily domesticated. Place such fragments in a common sandstone vase, such as are frequently to be found in gardens, and pour a little soft water over them. In time—it may be days or weeks, or months even—the plant is sure to make itself observed, and by degrees will be so firmly established in the grain of the stone, that even if dried up for weeks from accidental causes, a shower, or the addition of a little water, will cause the sides of the stone to blush "celestial rosy red" almost. A very good way of examining the plant under the microscope, is to keep little bits of glass in the vase. These become covered with it, and can be put under the microscope without any disturbance of the specimen.

II.

"*There the dark blue Gentians and the Alpine Rose as it is called.*"

THE "Alp Rose" here meant is a dwarf Rhododendron, *Rhododendron ferugineum*. (*Rostfarbige Alpenrose*.) There is a true Alpine rose, *Rosa Alpina*, also.

The Gentian alluded to is *Gentiana acaulis*; our garden Gentianella. It is not, however, so common in Switzerland as the brighter blued *Gentiana Bavarica*.

* See "*Nereis Boreali-Americana*," Part iii., pp. 116, 117.

“WHEREUNTO?”

I.

“And yet I have an advantage too, and that a very great one.”



ILAC-LEGS, (the common *Uraster rubens*, so abundant all round our coasts,) is supposed to allude here to one of the *inexplicable attributes*, as professor Rymer Jones calls them, of the starfish race, which “defy the acuteness of physiological research.”

At the extreme end of each ray, or leg, or arm, (whichever you choose to call them,) is to be found, in many species, a red or black spot, round which, says Rymer Jones, “the terminal spines cluster as though for their protection.” Some naturalists have concluded these to be eyes, or organs of vision of some sort; but while disputing this, upon grounds into which none but scientific people can follow him, our Professor bears unqualified testimony to this fact, that starfishes are “extraordinarily gifted creatures.” “That they do perceive what is going on in the world around them,” says he, “at least in so far as their own business is concerned, there cannot exist a doubt; nay, that their perceptions are acute and rapid, any one who has witnessed the facility with which they find and devour a bait, or a morsel of food, will readily allow; but how they are enabled to effect this is by no means so easily explained. That it must be by some sense analogous either to smell or vision, seems pretty evident; but where we are to look for their noses or eyes, is a problem not of very easy solution.”

In lecturing on this subject at Berwick-upon-Tweed, the late Dr. Johnston declared his opinion that the black spot was an organ of some sense, but of which could not be discovered; adding that “it was wrong to conceive that because we had only five senses, starfishes or other animals could have no more, or none which was not analogous to ours;” that “we knew that many of them wanted senses which we have, but we could not tell but they might possess senses which we had not.”

Some allusion has already been made to this in a note upon “Knowledge not the Limit of Belief,” vol. i., p. 167.

II.

“The loss of a leg or two is nothing to either of us.”

THIS is a well-known fact, as may be read in any sea-side book. A common five-rayed starfish will occasionally throw off a leg, or ray,

in an aquarium, and walk on, along one side of the vessel, by means of its *sucker* feet, while *the leg* walks off in another! The latter dies at last, however, if such an expression may be used; and, unfortunately, the starfish itself is very apt to do the same in confinement. Crabs also can afford to lose their limbs, which sprout and grow again like the branches of a tree.

III.

"The more I lay hold, the more it slips away."

STARFISHES move by means of a multitude of tiny *suckers* or *feet*, with which the under surface of the rays is furnished. Dr. Harvey's description makes the process quite intelligible. "It is exceedingly curious to watch the activity that exists among those numberless sucking feet, when a living starfish is placed on its back in a shallow vessel of water. If it have previously been touched on the lower surface, all the feet will have recoiled within the body, leaving nothing visible but a series of minute tubercles; but when the starfish is allowed to recover its ease, they will quickly issue, like so many worms from their holes, and after moving backwards and forwards through the water, will bend round in the direction of the nearest ground: those that first reach it will affix their suckers, and, by contracting, will pull down a portion of the body, so as to enable others to attach themselves, until a sufficient number of suckers being attached, their conjoint power is sufficient to bring round the body of the starfish to its proper position."—*The Sea-Side Book*, p. 137.

It is clear from this that Lilac-legs' sucker feet would require something solid to which to attach themselves in the first instance, and that the shifting sand offered her no such support.

IV.

"It is the blue-eyed Limpet, I beg to say—the Patella pellucida, if you please."

THE *Patella pellucida* scarcely needs an introduction to any observant shore-wanderer. Its lovely little blue-streaked or spotted shell is constantly to be seen closely fixed on the smooth olive leaves (fronds) of the great Tangle (*Laminaria digitata*) on which it feeds.

V.

"We can afford to speak—we, of whose dwelling-places it is the foundation and support."

THE Zoophyte here alluded to—the Sea-mat (*Flustra membranacea* of Drs. Johnston and Landsborough; *Membranipora membranacea* of Mr. Busk)—"forms a beautiful gauze-like incrustation on the broad frond of several sea-weeds, but especially of *Laminaria digitata*." This gauze-like incrustation is made up of a multitude of the minutest cells, laid side by side in a regular quincunx pattern; and as each cell is inhabited by a living Polype, it is reckoned that in a specimen five feet in length and eight in breadth, found by Dr. Landsborough, and by no means uncommon in size, the "web of silvery lace had been the work and habitation of above two millions of industrious inmates."

Still, they are microscopically small, and may well speak "in a whisper," although always "in unison," from the strict uniformity of their plans and proceedings of life! Professor Wyville Thomson has used the word *Canacium* to express the skeleton portion of a compound Zoophyte, or collection of Polype dwellings; and as its meaning is *common house*, there seems no reason why it should not be applied to compound Zoophyte specimens generally, as well as to those (Polyzoa) of which he more particularly writes. It is a good word, inasmuch as it helps to explain what a compound Zoophyte is, namely, a *common house*, in which each Polype has a *separate room to himself*; these rooms being, in other words, cells, variously placed and arranged in the different genera.

VI.

" 'Hear how they talk,' murmured another shell-fish, no distant relation of the blue-eyed limpet."

Patella levis, also dotted with bluish lines, but by no means so bright and beautiful as *Patella pellucida*; of which, however, it is pronounced by modern naturalists to be merely a variety, caused by difference of food and *habitat*. It is found "among the fibres of the root (of the *Laminaria*), and very frequently within the bulb of *Laminaria bulbosa*;" feeding on them, of course.

VII.

"Am I right, little Silver-tuft in the corner there, with the elegant doors to your house?"

THE mouth of each cell in the *Cænæcium* of *Canda reptans* (*Cellularia reptans*, Johnston), is protected, and at the same time adorned, by a carved projection a *little* like the end of a stag's horn. This curious defence to the small dwelling-place, rises "by a short tube from the side of the cell," just beyond the opening, and projecting forward, bends over the mouth of the cell in front. This kind of "process" is called an *operculum*. It exists in several species of the Polyzoa, in different forms. The one to *Canda reptans* is extremely beautiful, and may easily be observed under the microscope.

For an accurate representation, see Mr. Busk's "Catalogue of Marine Polyzoa," plate xxi., fig. 3.

VIII.

"Now little Silver-tuft, the Coralline."

Coralline is an inaccurate term, being strictly applicable only to the vegetable *Corallines*. But it has been used for so long in speaking of some sorts of Zoophytes, that there would be a difficulty in substituting another word.

IX.

"To keep me, the great Sea, pure and sweet and healthy!"

THAT this is one use of the great Tangles, as of all other sea-weeds, there is no doubt; but that it is but one among innumerable others, is equally certain. If the Sea was right here in his assertion, it was not that the other speakers had been wrong, but that all were equally judging of a large subject by a limited capacity, and narrowed it accordingly. Novalis says no one knows half how interesting he is. Certainly no one knows half, or a hundredth part, how useful he is, whether he intends it or not. Even a stranded ship is a beacon at sea, according to good old Father Catz. And if a bad example may help somebody as a warning, how much more a good one as a guide. God in His good providence wills that men shall be social and dependent one upon another. No living being exists, whatever be his condition in life, however young, however apparently helpless and dependent, who does not in his turn influence others. Let every one, then, be sure that he, individually, is *wanted*—is of *use*—has his *special*

purpose in the great economy of existence, whether he can find out what that use is or not; and while he thanks God for the privilege and honour, so to speak, of a life so full of meaning, let him pray that he may use it aright.

"PURRING WHEN YOU'RE PLEASED."

 HE purring of cats, like a good many other common things, is not easily accounted for. Bell, in his "History of British Quadrupeds," says that it "depends upon some peculiar action of the organs of voice, not yet satisfactorily explained." The article *Felis*, in the "Penny Cyclopædia," says, "Vicq-d'Azyr and Blumenbach notice the two delicate membranes lying under the *ligamenta glottidis* of the cat, which, probably, cause the purring noise peculiar to it." The writer has had the opportunity of appealing to a high authority, on the subject, Professor Owen, whose account is as follows. "We attribute the power of purring in the cat to the delicate membranes attached to the 'vocal chords' of the *larynx*, or voice-organ. These are set in vibratory motion under a placid sensation of comfort, and especially when associated with a sense of attachment to the individual causing the comfort; as when a pet cat, from the cold exterior in winter is taken on the warm lap, and pleasantly smoothed."

This "all" of explanation is very limited, and we must needs fall back on the bald fact that it is the *nature* of cats to purr when they are pleased! Nor of domestic cats only. Those who wish to hear purring in perfection must listen to a tiger or leopard (I cannot recall which, but probably the cheetah, or hunting leopard) as he paces up and down in front of his cage-bars in a menagerie, gurgling purr-melodies of the richest description.

"THE DELIVERER."

 EAN PRIDEAUX, in his learned work on "The Connection of the History of the Old and New Testament," says, that for about forty years before the birth of Christ, the world became filled with prophecies of all sorts, claiming to be the utterances of the Sibyls; and amongst these prophecies there were several which foretold the coming of the Messiah, and the greatness, bliss, and righteousness of his kingdom. The Dean

specially mentions *Pollio*, Virgil's fourth Eclogue; also a prediction referred to by Julius Marathus, which contains these words, *Regem populo Romano naturam paturire*—"That nature was about to bring forth a son that should be king of the Romans." "Neither of which," he says, "can admit a rational interpretation any otherwise than when applied to the Messiah."

But these speak only of the birth of the Messiah in general, without specifying the people of whom he should be descended, or the country where he should be born. Whereas Tacitus, who wrote towards the end of the first century of the Christian era, speaking of the time when Vespasian waged war with the Jews, hath these words: "A firm persuasion had prevailed among a great many, that it was contained in the ancient sacerdotal books, that about this time it should come to pass that the East should prevail, and that those who should come out of Judæa should obtain the empire of the world."—(*Tacitus, Histor.*, lib. v., cap. 13.) Suetonius, who lived in the first and second centuries of the Christian era, speaking of the same thing, saith as follows: "There had prevailed all over the East an ancient and constant notion that the fates had decreed, that about that time there should come out of Judæa those who should obtain the empire of the world."—(*Suetonius in Vespasiano*, cap. 4.) Both these writers refer the popular traditions to the coming of Vespasian out of Judæa to the empire, but the application is obvious to "The Deliverer."

INFERIOR ANIMALS.

I.

"*Tell me what these grand assemblies are for.*"



HAVE the permission of General S. S. to give the following pretty account of rook-taming. In the Spring of 1859, while visiting in Hampshire, General S. S. was told by his hostess, Lady W., that she had succeeded in making herself so friendly with the rooks near the house, that they all flew to meet her, and kept quite close to her. It came about thus.

She was watching them gathering sticks to make their nests, and being struck with their cries of alarm when she approached some heaps of sticks they had accumulated, and seeing that when she withdrew a short way they hurriedly seized upon them, she amused herself by going into the wood and collecting a considerable armful of the same sort of sticks, which she proceeded to lay down in the same place for them. Of these they took possession almost imme-

diately, as if they had collected them themselves. She repeated the experiment frequently, and always with the same result, the birds evidently hailing her arrival with delight. After a time she brought some food also with the sticks, and this kindness cemented their friendship; so that they soon approached her almost too familiarly, and continued to do so during the time of their building and laying.

Again, Mr. Gould wrote in Nov., 1860, in answer to an inquiry on my part as to their large assemblies: "Of rook parliaments I know but little. They are, however, at *this* time assembling in *myriads* every afternoon in Richmond Park, as I witnessed when paying a visit a few evenings since to Professor Owen. In the Spring they have other occupations."

The Rev. C. A. Johns, in his "British Birds in their Haunts," page 250, speaking of rooks, suggests that there is still a fair field of inquiry open to any competent person who would undertake to devote his whole attention to this one bird for a considerable period of time. "Such a biographer," he adds, "should make himself master of all that has been recorded by various authorities, and should then visit a large number of rookeries in all parts of the kingdom, collecting and sifting evidence, making a series of personal observations, and spreading his researches over all seasons of the year."

The rook (*Corvus frugilegus*) is considered the chief English representative of the crow race (*Corvidæ*), as the Hooded Crow (*Corvus cornix*) is in Scandinavia and the Isles of Scotland. "The Old Bushranger" noticed a stray pair of the former in a wet meadow in Lapland in the month of May, but after haunting the spot for three days, they migrated a few miles farther south, where, unluckily, they were shot; so that whether they would have so far foregone their usual gregarious habits, as to found a colony there alone, could not be ascertained.

II.

"*Alas, for the barriers which lie so mysteriously between us and the other creatures among whom we are born, and pass our short existence upon earth.*"

THE following passage from Dr. Newman's writings (quoted by Professor Harvey in his "Sea-Side Book," p. 168), would seem to have suggested the above and many following remarks. I give Dr. Newman's words for the pleasure and benefit of those who are yet unacquainted with them, assuring the reader, at the same time, that I was quite unconscious of remembering or even having read Dr. Newman's observations at the time I made my own. I speak this in all good faith, so do not alter the words in my Parable.

"We are in a world of spirits as well as in a world of sense, and we hold communion with it, and take part in it, though we are not conscious of doing so. If this seems strange to any one, let him reflect that we are undeniably taking part in a third world, which we do indeed see, but about which we do not know more than about the angelic hosts,—the world of brute animals. Can anything be more marvellous or startling, unless we were used to it, than that we should have a race of beings about us whom we do but see, and as little know of their state, or can describe their interests or their destiny, as we can tell of the inhabitants of the sun and moon? It is indeed a very overpowering thought, when we get to fix our minds on it, that we familiarly use, I may say hold intercourse with, creatures who are as much strangers to us, as mysterious as if they were the fabulous, unearthly beings, more powerful than man, yet his slaves, which Eastern superstitions have invented. We have more real knowledge about the angels than about the brutes," &c.

"THE GENERAL THAW."



HERE is an old story, but it will bear repeating once more. The tendencies which have been observed to exist in the natural world—laws of Nature as they are called—are for the most part so inexorable in their *fixity*, that we can depend and act upon them through life, in perfect assurance they will never fail us.

Winter and Summer, seed-time and harvest, return to us regularly through the ages. "The full-juiced apple, waxing over-mellow," drops upon the earth rather than off from it, since the world began. The particles which compose the pebble we lift from the ground, hold fast together, instead of dispersing to the four winds of Heaven like a bomb-shell. We trust ourselves on the shore within a few inches of high-water mark, let the waves swell never so high. God has said, "Thus far shalt thou go and no further." Man says that he has discovered the law of the tides.

Nothing can be more satisfactory as to results. Neither our confidence nor our comfort are misplaced; there is no fear of our being taken in; we are not at the mercy of chance in such matters; every thing goes on *regularly*—according to some *rule*, or habit; or, as naturalists word it, by virtue of some fixed *law*.

But there is a danger. We are so thoroughly comfortable in our confidence, that we have a tendency to drift into a hazy sensation, if

nothing more, that because things are as they are, they could not be otherwise; that those physical tendencies, or laws of Nature—gravitation, cohesion, &c., for instance, exist in the *nature of things*, and that, consequently, there is no providential overruling on our behalf. But how incomplete is such an explanation! Indeed it is none at all. What is Nature? There was once a mania in literature for personifying every thing. Vices, virtues, qualities, thoughts even, all figured in allegorical story as individuals. Klopstock addressed an ode to "Recovery" as a "Daughter of Creation." In those days, according to old frontispieces, Nature was a black-haired Roman Matron standing under a tree surrounded by Birds and Beasts, and touching with a conjuror's wand the celestial orbs in the roughly limned sky. We have come out of barbarisms in art, but it is not so clear that a lingering faith in the old Roman lady does not exist among us yet! There are some minds which will accept any personifications but those which are demanded of them as an article of faith; and to these Nature is—if not the quizzical matron of the frontispieces—a *somebody*, and a very powerful somebody too—a Baal for the high places of thought. Or if we prefer talking of the "*nature of things*," what exactly do we mean? How did such a nature get into the things? Did inanimate matter make rules for its own guidance? is that a less mysterious and more reasonable creed than the Apostles? Is the beautiful and regular system by which the world and its inhabitants move and live and have their being, the result of blindly acting laws existing "naturally" (?) in blind unintelligent matter; unalterable therefore of course, like those of the Medes and Persians, and fully justifying the idea that no amount of fallible human testimony can make the interruption of them credible?

Does not, on the contrary, the following otherwise inexplicable divergence from one of those "fixed laws" point unmistakably to a providential arrangement for a definite end; and show that the laws not only *come from*, but *are in the hands of*, a definite Lawgiver, to change or hold back as He thinks fit; that every thing therefore might have been the reverse of what it is, and may be so yet some day, and that an absolute *nature of things* is a fiction of the human mind, which having observed certain tendencies in them for a certain length of time, sets them down for unalterable laws?

It is a law of Nature that bodies expand with heat and contract with cold. Gloves and rings tighten apparently on a hot hand—that is because the hand is swollen. Iron and glass equally follow the rule, so that you may extract a tightly-fixed stopper from the neck of a smelling-bottle by heating the neck outside. Being heated it expands, and the stopper, to which the heat has not extended, finds

itself in a roomier space and is free to come out. The thermometer was constructed on the strength of this law; the mercury within it shrinks and therefore sinks in a cold atmosphere, and swells, and therefore rises up in a warm one as often as you remove it from one temperature to another.

But there is one body which, without any (by man) assignable reason, having followed this law up to a certain point, suddenly breaks through it and does precisely the reverse! That body is *Water*. Under the influence of cold, Water, like all his brother creatures, contracts and becomes heavier—(that second result being another law of Nature)—until the temperature has diminished to 40° Fahrenheit, at which degree of coolness it is at its greatest density, *i. e.* has contracted as far as it *will* contract. But now, what happens? If the cold goes on, the water, contrary to all precedent, begins to *expand*—and at 32°, or ice, is much *lighter* than it was at 40°.

Call aloud to the high places and ask your Nature with the personifying capital N to explain this, and if you can get no answer of explanation from her, look around you, and you will at any rate see the beneficial results of this infringement of a nominally “fixed” law. Hence ice floats, and hence in the sea and in large bodies of water, water remains water, not ice, under the protecting coat of the surface-ice, and hence fishes live instead of perishing from off the face of the globe.

A naturalist friend speaks to me of this as the “one great and chiefest ‘providential’ departure from the *stringent fixity* and immutability of a physical law; without which indeed life would be, if not impossible, at least most precarious on the globe.” He adds, “Where, as in the case of freezing water, we see that fluid, and *that alone*, forming an exception to a great general law, and when we know what beneficent results arise from that *exceptional* divergence, then I do think that we who believe in a superintending Providence, have some real ground to stand on.” “It is an old story,” he concludes, “as old as the hills and a little older.” Moreover, it is to be met with in plenty of books; but it is a good story and worth meditating upon, and some may read it here who by some accident have not seen it elsewhere.

The following process is described by my naturalist friend:—

A BOWL OF WATER.

“Surface cools to 40°; the cold particles shrink and sink to the bottom. New surface cools to 40° and goes down, the warmer water rising through to be cooled to 40° and sent down, till *all* the water in the bowl be cooled to 40°. The *surface* then goes on cooling to 39°, 38°, 37°, &c., but no longer do the cold particles *sink*, because they

now *expand*, or grow lighter: As they *remain* on the surface, the process of continued cooling surface goes on rapidly, and when it comes to 32° ice is formed. If the cold goes on increasing, the ice will *gradually* thicken, and if the water be shallow, all will eventually become ice. But if it be deep, a large body of water at a temperature suitable to maintain fish-life will remain unfrozen. And this result is due to that very remarkable and exceptional *providential irregularity* in the contraction of water."

On this subject a very acute and subtle thinker goes further still, and denies the correctness of the word *Law* as applied to the tendencies we observe in Nature, quoting an expression in a former Parable (The Light of Truth, Series I.), "the laws of Nature which are the *acted will of God*," as coinciding exactly with what he believes to be the actual truth; viz., that everything goes on day by day through, by, and from, the will of an Almighty God. And in a comment on a passage from Dean Trench (now Archbishop of Dublin), "*It is a will upon which we can securely count; from the past expressions of it we can presume its future; and so we rightfully call it a law*," he observes, "I would say a *precedent*" (rather than a law). But this very comment shows that the difference between the Archbishop of Dublin and Canon Trevor is rather one of phraseology than opinion; and so long as the rather dangerous word "*law*" is acknowledged to mean law only with reference to man, and not as regards the Almighty, *whose will is man's law and the law of "the creature" also, whether animate or inanimate*, there is no objection to the term. It serves to express a systematic routine, conducted upon a principle—that is all.

"LIGHT OF LIFE."

"Dig a hole in a sheltered place, pretty deep, you know, and put in a bone or two and some hair."



HE value of *hair* as a manure for rose-trees was told me by a gentleman who had used it himself, and attributed, in a great measure, to it his success in obtaining prizes for roses. He also explained how fond rose-tree roots were of getting hold of bones, round which they would twine themselves whenever they had a chance. Watering with soap-suds was mentioned to me by another practical friend—animal assisting vegetable life, as vegetable does animal in its turn.

“NIGHT AND DAY.”

“*Old Northern tales say that they rode, each of them in a car with a horse to it,*” &c.



THE allusion is to the Edda of Snorro Sturleson, as translated in M. Mallet's "Northern Antiquities," vol. ii. p. 33:—"Then the Universal Father took Night and Day, and placed them in Heaven; and gave them two horses and two cars, that they might travel successively, one after the other, round the world. Night goes first, upon her horse named *Rimfaze* (or Frosty-mane), who, every morning when he begins his course, bedews the earth with the foam that drops from his bit; this is the Dew. The horse made use of by Day is named *Skinfaze* (or Shiny-mane), and by his radiant mane he illuminates the air and the earth."

The following free translation from the Latin version of the more ancient poetical Edda of *Sæmund Sigfusson*, surnamed *Frode*, or the Learned, has been made by my husband.

Odin (under the name of Gangrade) has repaired to the Giant Vafthrudin for a sort of passage of intellectual arms. The Giant asks who he is, declaring he will not be allowed to leave the place unless he can prove his intellectual superiority. Their dialogue then opens by certain questions proposed on the part of the Giant as a test of Odin's ability:—

GIANT.

Tell me, Odin, if you will
Give a sample of your skill,
What the horse is call'd, whose flight
Draws each day from realms of night,
And restores the world to light?

ODIN.

Shiny-mane we call the steed,
And he comes of purest breed;
From his mane there streams a blaze
Glistening like the Sun's bright rays—
He it is who leads the days.

GIANT.

Name me, Odin, now the horse
Who at eve renews his course;
Drawing Night from Eastern skies
Over earth, and heaven where lies
The dwelling of the Deities?

ODIN.

Frosty-mane draws out the night,
 Veiling Heaven from our sight ;
 From his bit the drops distil
 Like the tears our eyes that fill,
 Dewing over vale and hill.

Sœmund Sigfusson was, according to M. Mallet, the first who "ventured to commit to writing the ancient religious poetry which many people still retained by heart." He was born in Iceland about the year 1057, and studied in Germany, chiefly at Cologne, with his countryman Are, who also obtained the surname *Frode*, or Learned.

Snorrio Sturleson, author of the prose Edda, lived 122 years afterwards. He was of an illustrious family, and the date of his birth is 1179. He was Supreme Judge of Iceland in the years 1215 and 1222. Both Eddas are supposed to have been written for the use of the young Scalds or Poets, and not as volumes of religious instruction ; Iceland having just before emerged from Paganism. As people might write now an account of Greek and Roman Mythology, were its introduction in literature as fashionable as it once used to be among us. But inasmuch as the poetical collection of Sœmund Frode was "voluminous and in many respects obscure, and not sufficiently adapted to common use," Snorrio Sturleson devoted his labours to the compilation of a more simple and intelligible account of the ancient faith ; drawing it up chiefly in dialogue form, as the early poems had been given.

The word *Edda* has been a subject of contention among etymologists, but M. Mallet thinks its derivation from an old word signifying *Grandmother* the most probable. "In the figurative language of the old poets this term was, doubtless, thought proper to express an ancient doctrine."

KICKING.

"*The people there—in the East, I mean—treat young colts quite differently from the people here.*"



So soon as the foal is weaned, the women take possession of it, saying : ' It belongs to us now ; it is an orphan, but we will make its life as pleasant as possible.'—*The Horses of the Sahara*, p. 73.

" Though weaned, the foal accompanies its dam to the pasture.

This exercise is found necessary to its health, and to the development of its faculties. In the evening it comes home to lie down beside the tent of its owner. There it is to every member of the family the object of the greatest care. The women and the children sport with it, and give it *Kouskousou*, (a kind of semolina, made with wheaten flour; as universal with the Arabs as soup with continental Europeans,) bread, flour, milk, and dates. This daily contact leads to that docility which is so much admired in Arab horses."—*Ibid*, p. 75.

"The education of a colt should commence when eighteen months old, because it is the only way to make him thoroughly docile At the age, then, of eighteen to twenty months, the colt is mounted by a child who takes him to water, goes in search of grass, or leads him to the pasture The child grows up a horseman, and the colt acquires the habit of carrying a weight proportioned to his strength. He learns to walk, to fear nothing, and it is in this manner, say the Arabs, that 'we contrive never to have restive horses.' The first time the child mounts the colt, he should say, while in the act of bestriding him, 'Glory to Him who has subjected the horse to us! without Allah we should never have accomplished it.'"—*Ibid*, pp. 76, 77, 78.

The above passages are sufficient to justify Egeria's remarks, but they are but glimpses into the interesting account of the "Rearing and Breaking in" of Arab horses, given in Mr. Hutton's translation of General Daumas' "Horses of the Sahara."

IMPERFECT INSTRUMENTS.

I.

"Presented him with a bit of music-paper, on which twenty notes were marked down."

 HE scale for "*equal temperament*," as the general way of tuning a pianoforte or organ is called. It commences with the central C (C on the third space treble), which being properly pitched is the guide for tuning, in exact unison, the octave below. From this lower C a fifth ascending (G) is tuned, *but slightly flat*; then its octave below, perfect; then a fifth ascending (D), *flat also*, &c., &c.; the scale ending with E flat, *slightly sharp*. And from the twenty notes, when completed, all the rest of the instrument is tuned in perfect octaves. This tuning is called "*equal temperament*," because the defects inseparable from regulating the tones of an imperfect instrument by a perfect theory of sounds

are *equally distributed* throughout the keys, so that all can be used. It is possible to tune a *few* of the keys more perfectly, but at the expense of the rest, which are then discordant. This second method is called *unequal temperament*, and is by some organists considered preferable for Church Music; in which the extreme keys (A flat, &c.) are seldom required.

II.

"The tuning's too perfect by half."

GERONIMO had worked accurately by his scale, in ignorance of the fact, that throughout the whole of the "equal temperament" tuning the *fifths* have to be left either a little *flat*, or a little *sharp*. In no case can they be tuned as *perfect fifths*. This is the distribution of error, or defects, alluded to in the previous note.

III.

"Because it's an imperfect instrument, sir."

ALL instruments with fixed tones are necessarily imperfect. The sounds are limited; in our pianofortes and organs, for instance, C sharp does double duty, serving as D flat also; D sharp as E flat; E sharp as F natural, and so on; and occasionally the matter is pressed further still, natural notes serving as double flats, &c.

No one but a scientific musician can understand how this imperfection works; and as Sir F. A. G. Ousely gives our octave scale, with its limit of twelve Semitones, credit for being the one best suited for harmony and composition, describing the Arabian subdivision into eighteen thirds of tones as "*crude and elaborate*" and incapable of harmonic combinations, we ought to be well satisfied. Nevertheless, there is an imperfection about our keyed instruments which renders it impossible to carry out the tuning theory perfectly upon them. Perhaps that is adapted for pure sounds only, in the same way that the theory of red, blue, and yellow forming white in combination, is the theory of pure colours. Certain it is, that to obtain a general harmony of the instrument the tuning process has in its details to bend to the fatal necessities of imperfection in the materials dealt with.

COBWEBS.

I.

"Which, considering that she had eight eyes to do it with," &c.

PIDERS have generally eight, sometimes six eyes, variously arranged on the head in different species. They are simple and immovable, and therefore only avail in the direction towards which they are set. Hence, no doubt, their multiplicity.

II.

"Thus much may be hinted: out of four little spinning machines near the tail came four little threads, and the rope was a four-twist of these."

THESE spinning machines are called "*Spinnerets*," or "*Spinners*." Mr. Gosse gives the following description of both rope and spinning apparatus. "The threads of a Spider's web, fine as they are, must not be considered as simple filaments, but as ropes composed of many strands:—The spinning apparatus consists of four little teats or warts at the hinder extremity of the body. The upper pair of these are perforated at their tips with innumerable holes of inconceivable minuteness, so as to resemble a colander, and through each of these holes proceeds a thread. The lower pair are similarly perforated, but are set in addition with a number of prominent tubes, which furnish threads also. Within the body at this part there are several bags filled with gummy matter, which, at the will of the animal, is forced through the orifices, and hardens into elastic silk on exposure to the air. The Spider applying the ends of the teats to any fixed object, the gum adheres, and by her progress a cord is drawn out which consists of as many constituent threads as there are minute orifices in her spinnerets."—*Excelsior*, vol. iv. p. 30.

Kirby and Spence describe four or six little teat-like protuberances or spinners, and say further, that each "spinner" having produced a compound thread (as described by Mr. Gosse), "these four or six (compound) threads, at the distance of about one-tenth of an inch from the apex of the spinners, again unite and form the thread we are accustomed to see, which the spider uses in forming its web."

Considerable difference of opinion exists as to the number of filaments issuing from each spinneret. Some say 1000, others 400, &c.

Spiders have the power of closing the orifices of their spinnerets at pleasure, and so of stopping at any given point in their descent.

IV.

"Then she cleared the remains out of her chamber and sat down to think."

WHEN the House Spider, *Tegenaria domestica*, has finished her web, she "does not station herself upon it, but in a silken apartment constructed below it and completely hidden from view." Between which apartment and the edge of the web she extends certain threads, which, as soon as the web is touched by an insect, vibrate and give her warning, besides forming a bridge "on which in an instant she can run to secure it." "Out then," says Mr. Gosse, "rushes the spider with lightning rapidity, seizes it with her fangs, and carries it into the den to be sucked and exhausted of its juices," after which she casts out the skeleton remains †

"BIRDS IN THE NEST."



THE bird chosen by Mr. Wolff for his beautiful illustration of this Parable is the *The long-tailed Tit* (*Paruscaudatus*). Nor could a happier selection have been made, as the following passage from "British Birds in their Haunts" (by the Rev. C. A. Johns) will satisfy the reader.

"From the time that a young brood leaves the nest until the next pairing season, father, mother, and children keep together in irreproachable harmony. Exploring the same clump of trees in society, perfectly agreed as to whither their next flitting shall be, no one showing any disposition to remain when the rest are departing, molesting no one, and suffering, as far as it can be ascertained, no persecution, they furnish a charming example of a 'happy family.'"

